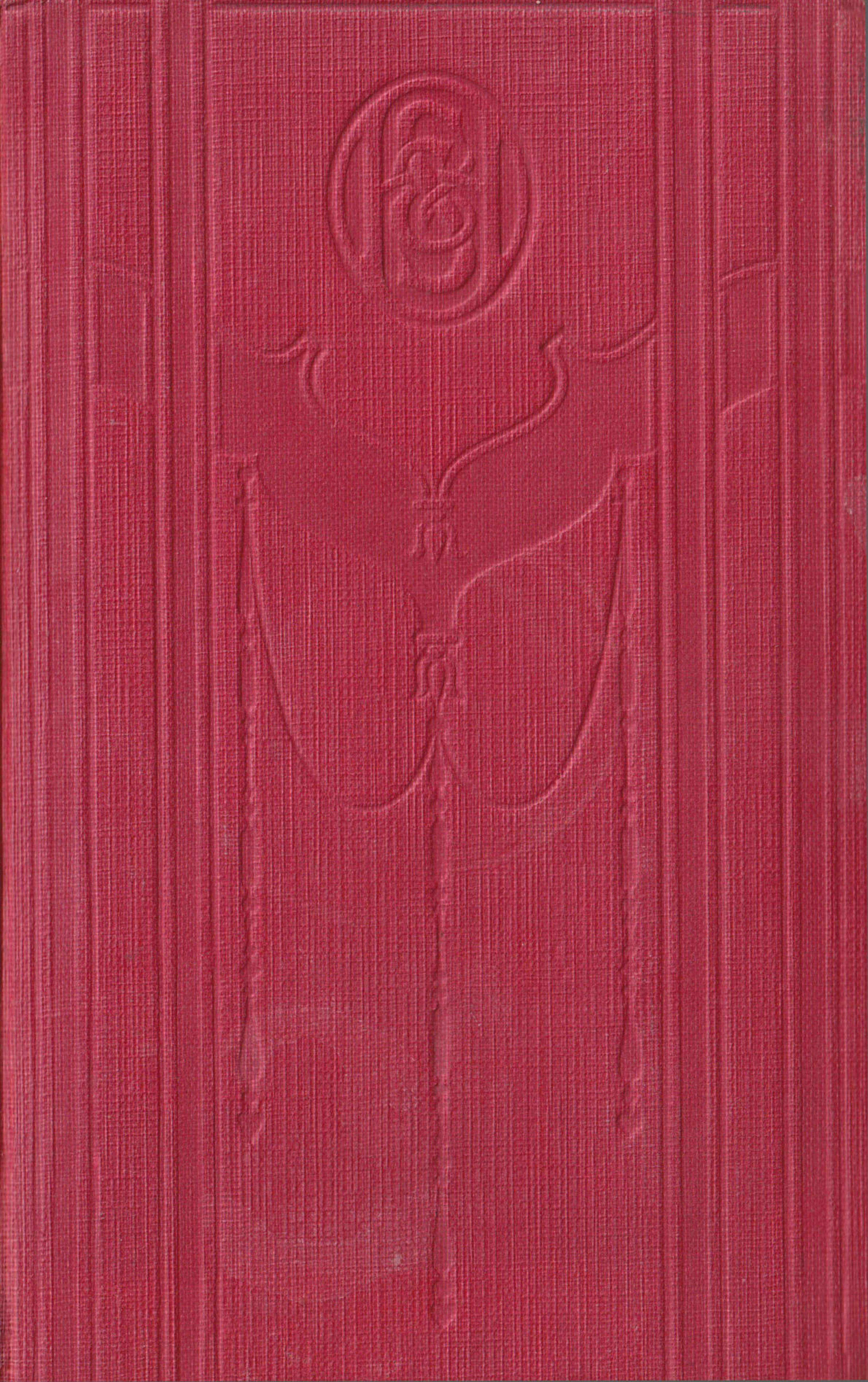
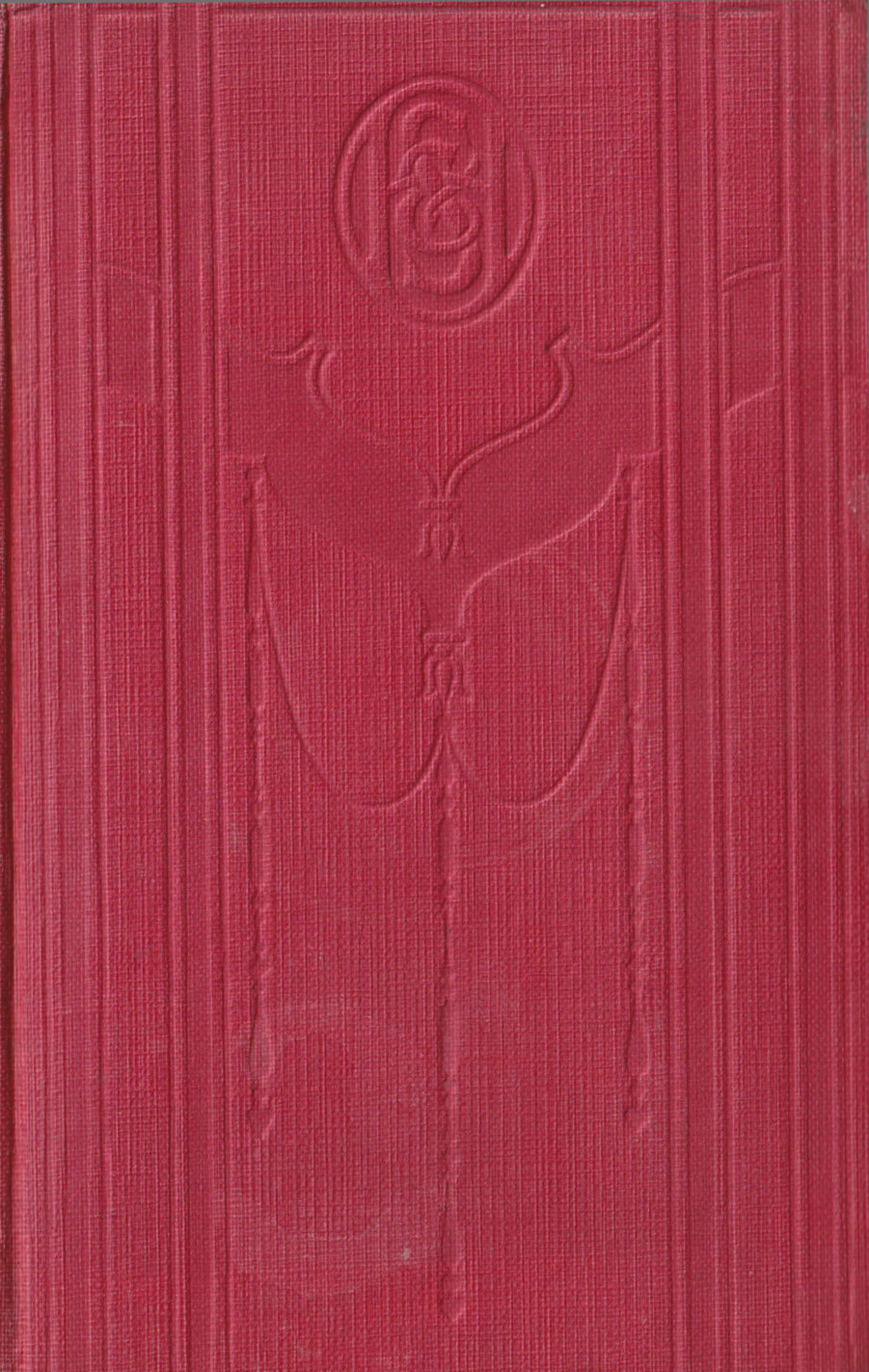


MR. MALCOLM PRESENTS

GERARD
FAIRLIE

HODDER &
STOUGHTON



S McDowell

MR: MALCOLM PRESENTS

GERARD FAIRLIE

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

First published 1932
Reprinted . . 1934

Made and Printed in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton Limited,
by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

The characters in this book—except, of course, my friends Bobby Jones, Cyril Tolley and Alexander the Starter at St. Andrews, all of whom I have ventured to introduce into the background of my story—are entirely imaginary, and have no relation to any living person.

CONTENTS

CHAP. PAGE

I Two Men Meet . . 9

II A Lift is Occupied . . . 18

III Marilyn's Moment of Fear . . 34

IV Mr. Malcolm forgets his Tea . . 42

V Fletcher is Confident . . 53

VI Fletcher's Smile Broadens . 61

VII Mr. Malcolm explains his Position . 67

VIII Mr. Malcolm keeps a Drink Waiting 79

IX The Manager resents Mr. Malcolm . 88

X Mr. Malcolm replaces a Clean Handkerchief 96

XI Wanted on the Telephone . 111

XII Fletcher tots up the Bill . . 121

XIII The Strange Visitor . . . 129

XIV Inspector Varney is Awed . . 142

XV Mr. Malcolm enters a Lady's Room . 147

XVI Inspector Varney is Forestalled . 163

XVII Mr. Malcolm gets on with the Case 179

XVIII A Conference is Held . . . 196

XIX Constable Mackintosh forgets his New Suit 208

Contents

CHAP. PAGE

XX Mr. Malcolm loses some Sleep . . 213

XXI Marilyn is Restless 222

XXII Venn hastens Home in Daylight . 237

XXIII Venn finds Mr. Malcolm Awake . 249

XXIV Noel Venn is instructed to order Porridge 256

XXV Mr. Malcolm asks a Question . . 267

XXVI Mr. Malcolm has no Choice . . 290

XXVII Mr. Malcolm plays above Himself . 303

XXVIII Marilyn adds Cream to Mr. Malcolm's Porridge 312

CHAPTER I

Two Men Meet

THERE came a knock at the door.

The man seated at the writing-desk, busily occupied in the composition of a letter, automatically gave the customary reply.

" Come in," he said.

But he did not look up from his writing as the door opened to admit a stranger. For a moment or two this newcomer stood quite silent and quite still looking at the man who, unconscious of his presence, was sitting at the desk. A faint flicker of a smile played around his mouth, but this smile in no way conveyed to the outside world that he was amused. It was a cruel smile, almost a contortion of the features, revealing a cynical humour that had little relation to mirth. For a space of time which could have lasted no more than a few seconds, yet which seemed to be very much longer to the watcher at the door while he waited for the other to look up, while he waited for that glance of horrified recognition which he knew would come, he stood there quite silently. That caricature of a smile was still upon his face.

The man seated at the desk laid down his pen and looked up to see who had interrupted him. Even as he did so the stranger stepped right into the room and closed the door behind him.

From his expression, from his whole attitude it was obvious that the newcomer had expected to see some form of shocked surprise on the face of the man whom he was visiting: but he was doomed to disappointment. The man looked up. True, for a moment, but for a moment only, his eyes narrowed and his expression changed to one of rigid tenseness, yet this was so transient that nine times out of ten it would have passed unnoticed.

The man at the desk rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"Hullo!" he said. "We meet again."

The man at the door made no movement whatsoever towards taking the proffered hand. Instead he stood with his back to the door, and his smile had now vanished completely. He was glowering: he was angry: he had been cheated out of the effect of his entrance, and almost like a child he was petulantly disappointed. But when he spoke his voice was even, although hard.

"Yes," he said. "We meet again—and through no fault of yours."

The hand which had been offered to him in apparent friendship, was lowered once more, and the other man moved over to the fireplace before replying. When he turned again to face the intruder, for intruder this other undoubtedly was, it was obvious that he had regained complete control over himself, as complete as had been his disclosure that he had been alarmed in that moment of anxiety when first he had caught sight of the newcomer. He pointed to a chair.

" Sit down," he said.

The man at the door still made no movement.

" I prefer to stand."

" Just as you like," he paused for a moment, ". . . but I seem to remember that when last we met you would have been willing . . . only too willing "—he laughed harshly—" to sit down and accept my hospitality."

" Are you offering me a drink ? " said the man at the door quietly, so quietly that there was a sinister ring in his voice.

" I'm so sorry." The other laughed, but in his laugh could be discerned a suggestion of forced gaiety : evidently he was not entirely at his ease. " I quite forgot that I had formed that habit ! "

He moved over to the bell.

" What will you have ? "

For a long moment there was a pause. These men were fencing, verbally fencing with each other : both uncomfortable, both on their guard. But suddenly the passion which was blazing in the heart of the man who had entered that room so unexpectedly, burst forth in his speech.

" Do you think I'd take a drink from you? D'you think I'd . . ."

But with a movement of the hand, an imperious movement, the other stopped him.

" I don't know," he said, " really I can't tell you. All that I do know is that you've not been backward to accept when previously I've made some such suggestion."

For another moment they stared at one another, and then the man at the door laughed, and for the first time since he had entered that room the sound was natural.

" You're right," he said. " I haven't previously refused you . . . and that, perhaps, is why you are here."

" I don't understand you."

" Oh, yes, you do. If it hadn't been for drink after drink which you gave me on the boat would you be here now? "

The question was a challenge and the other was quick to accept it.

" Of course I should. You told me that the Championship was being played at St. Andrews and I am interested in golf."

" So interested," snarled the other, " that when the big match of the week takes place you are not out on the course to watch it."

For answer the man standing by the fireplace, the owner of that room, looked at his watch.

" There's plenty of time," he said. " I was writing a letter. I propose to go out when it is finished."

" An important letter ? "

" Yes."

" A business letter ? "

" If you will have it—yes, a business letter. But why this catechism ? "

" Because," said the other, advancing for the first time from the door into the middle of the room, " because I am perfectly certain that your business letter is concerned with me."

" With you ? "

The astonishment in the face and voice of the speaker was perfect, almost too perfect.

" With my business, if you like that better. With *my* business which you have assumed as your own. With the business which you made me talk about "—his voice was rising as his anger increased—" when I was under the influence of *your* drinks on that boat . . . when I was telling you about my private affairs . . . babbling as I should not have done, I agree, to a stranger . . . but telling a man I thought was my friend."

For a moment the other stared at him and in his face there was well-framed surprise, but he could not entirely control his voice when he replied, and it was obvious that the shot had gone home.

" I simply don't know what you're talking about," he said.

" Oh, yes, you do."

Once again the stranger took a step forward, ever approaching, purposefully, inevitably, the man standing by the fireplace.

" You know very well, my *friend*. You know why you have come here . . . that you have stolen what was mine . . . that you have impersonated me . . . that you are trying to get the money which should come to me . . . that you are . . ."

But again the other stopped him with a movement of the hand. There was something commanding about his personality, something which enabled him to achieve the desired result merely by a gesture.

" Money which should come to you ? "

The words formed a question, and a violent flush of anger appeared on the face of the stranger. But even if he were annoyed he controlled himself with an effort.

" Much more rightfully than to you, anyway. I had knowledge which I could sell. You've stolen that knowledge from me."

There was a short, tense pause.

" I don't understand you," suddenly remarked the man by the fireplace. " I've told you before that I do not steal . . . and I'm telling you now for the last time. We had several talks on the ship, I agree. You were indiscreet, I'll agree again, but that I've made capital out of the information which you have given me is ridiculous. Why are you so persistent ? "

" You do steal," broke in the other, and his voice was very low, very vicious. " You stole from me. If you hadn't made capital out of the knowledge which you obtained would you have come here and used my room ? . . . Would you be living here in my name ? Would you . . . ? "

But he got no further. Even as he had been speaking, even as the tell-tale words were leaving his lips, the man facing him, the man standing at the fireplace, had let his right hand drop to his pocket and now it flashed forward suddenly, so suddenly that the other had no time in which to act defensively. They were three or four yards apart, and this abrupt action on the part of the man at the fireplace had not been a blow levelled at his opponent. Instead he stood there, now obviously on the offensive, an automatic glistening in his hand, down the barrel of which the other found himself staring.

For a few seconds they stood thus at too great an interval for the stranger to make any attempt to reach his enemy before a death-dealing bullet could be despatched on its way. He stood there checkmated, a dawning light of fear showing in his eyes, and yet in his whole attitude a determination born almost of righteous anger, that he would not be beaten by this leaden blackmail.

" So that's your game ! " he said quietly, so softly, in fact, that the other could scarcely catch his words. " So that's your game ! You admit it, then ? You've stolen my secret . . .

you've made capital out of it." His voice was rising now. " You've . . ."

But he got no further.

" Shut up," said the man at the fireplace, the man holding the gun. " Do you want everyone to hear ? "

" No,"—the reply came promptly, " and there's nobody in the hotel . . . only a skeleton staff. They're all out watching that match, that match which you ought to be watching if you had come here innocently. They're all . . ."

But he made no attempt to complete his sentence. As he stood there he had been rising on his toes, for he knew that his only chance was to catch the other unawares. Even as he spoke he had been bracing his muscles for the desperate lunge which would achieve his purpose or prove disastrous. But he did not bother his mind about the consequences. He was there to wreak vengeance and he had but that thought in his brain. And yet, distracted though he was by the words which the other was speaking, the man by the fireplace listened to them only subconsciously, for he had noticed the tense expression creeping into the speaker's eyes, and had realized the desperate determination in the brain behind them.

And then, as the other started to heave himself bodily through the air with one hand outstretched towards the fingers that held the automatic, there was a dull metallic click.

A second later the man by the fireplace, who had not moved during the space of those hectic moments, was staring, white-faced, at a figure spread-eagled on the floor in front of him . . . the figure of the stranger.

CHAPTER II

A Lift is Occupied

FOR a few long moments, moments which seemed to occupy an hour, the man stood quite still, staring at the motionless form lying on the floor at his feet. It took him some little while to realize that his finger must have tightened on the trigger and that the man before him lying so still, lying in such an awkward position, was quite dead.

His first feeling, when his chaotic thoughts had resumed some form of order, was one of relief: his second, one of greater fear. His eyes wandered to the gun in his hand. He noticed that it was not smoking: perhaps automatic pistols fitted with silencers did not smoke, showed no signs of having dealt a dread blow. Yet, as he stared at it, he knew that from it had flown a messenger of death, a messenger which had deprived a fellow human being of his life upon this earth, a messenger which had been sent by him.

Then came panic.

He screamed, but no sound came from between his parched lips, no sound to bring him back to reality. He continued to stare at the gun in his hand, and even as he did so his fingers lost their grip and it fell to the floor. His eyes watched it leave his hand, watched it fall, watched it strike the thick carpet and lie there, and as if by some trick of fortune the pistol pointed directly at the head of the man sprawling by his feet. He waited. He expected that at any moment the gun would fire again, just as unexpectedly to him as it had fired before with such cruel consequences. He waited for a long time—or so it seemed to him—and even as he waited he was conscious of the ticking of a clock upon the mantelpiece just behind his head. No other sounds came to him at all, no sound of the outside world. He was alone with this tragedy which had been enacted in his room . . . he was face to face with death, and the meeting was not pleasant.

Through his disturbed brain rushed a turmoil of thoughts, as if some tidal wave had broken upon the beach which was his reason. He struggled against the wild ideas which surged through his mind: he fought against a desire to rush from that place, to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the motionless figure at his feet. He could not quite understand what had happened. He knew that he hated the man who had discovered his treachery, the man who had caught him red-handed in the act of benefiting by a theft . . . but he did not hate him enough to hang for him. And again he found himself wondering how it was that he had let himself be caught red-handed:

how it had come about that what had appeared to be a fool-proof plan should have been found out and wrecked by the premature appearance of the man whom he was impersonating.

And all the time he stood there staring at the vicious automatic lying at his feet, staring with the sights towards the head of that lifeless body which lay so still.

But then suddenly, so abruptly, in fact, that he shook himself, he came out of his coma, just as if a lifebelt had been thrown to him rescuing him from the turbulent seas. His eyes narrowed. He lifted them from the gleaming pistol which lay there and looked at the sprawling body. And even as he got his mind to work the full realization of the deed came to him. The consequences were obvious. If indeed he had killed this man then he was guilty of murder, and if twelve good men and true were to find that verdict against him he would be sentenced by a judge to hang by the neck until he was dead.

The prospect was not appealing.

The sudden understanding that he was in danger, in the gravest danger, seemed to act as a spur upon his numbed faculties. He recovered his usual calm, and although he was deadly pale and a cold sweat had made its appearance upon his forehead, yet he was aware of none of these things. Once more he was in full possession of a quick-thinking brain, of that brain, in fact, which had made it possible for him to live in comfort throughout the last ten years of his life without any undue effort.

This was not the first time that James Fletcher had found himself in serious difficulty, and a cynical smile began to play about his lips even as he stood there still immobile, still in exactly the same position as he had been when the fatal message had sped from the gun in his hand, his only movement having been to look down when it had dropped to the floor, to look down at the horror which lay so near to him. On previous occasions he had been in dire peril, not of his life at the hangman's rope, perhaps, but undoubtedly of losing his liberty for a considerable time. Often before he had succeeded in emerging unscathed from his difficulties, and the knowledge of this fact gave him confidence that in this instance also he would succeed. His mind was racing now, his brain was working overtime, every sense alert to avert the dread consequences of that stupid act. For the more he considered the matter, the more did he realize how stupid, how senseless, he had been. The man who lay sprawling at his feet could never have been revenged upon him, because the very act by which he himself had benefited, the act without which his own theft could never have been possible, had been an illegal one. This man—Dickson—who had so rudely shattered his peace of mind, could never have blackmailed him, had been, in fact, without redress. To shoot him and thereby to place himself in this position had been the wayward action of a born fool.

And James Fletcher could not understand himself, for he was not a born fool. Much had happened in his past life to confirm him in his opinion that, if anything, he was more astute than were his fellow men. Through this very fact had he lived in comfort : through making capital of this very fact did he exist. To kill, therefore, a man whom he need not have feared above a rough-and-tumble, had been criminally negligent.

For a moment he looked down at that finger, that first finger of his right hand which must have pulled the trigger. He stared at it : he wagged his head at it : he reproved it actually in words. And even as he spoke he realized how rudely his nerve must be shattered, for he was behaving like a child. There was one thing paramount, one thing of immense importance. The body must be removed. No sign of what had occurred in that room that afternoon must ever be discovered. And with that thought came back to James Fletcher all his coolness, all his abilities. He was again in complete control of himself. He knew exactly what he had to do and in a very short time he was at work.

Overcoming a natural repugnance he touched the body of the man who had been alive so short a time before, whose voice he could still hear ringing in his ears. He knelt beside him, turned him over and looked at the face before him. Very little blood had come from the wound. Fletcher noticed that fact with interest and relief. There was only a very slight stain on the mat in front of the fireplace. Fletcher put his hand under Dickson's shirt and felt for his heart. It was not beating. He realized that the direction of the aim must have been good, must have been superlatively good, for death, obviously, had been instantaneous. He was surprised. He could not remember any conscious action of taking aim. And as this thought came into his mind he wondered whether should the worst come to the worst, he would receive any better treatment, any mercy from a jury because his crime had been so utterly unpremeditated. But then he shook himself free of these thoughts even as a dog might shake itself free of the clinging dampness resulting from a watery immersion: such thoughts were bad. They presupposed the possibility of failure, and Fletcher did not intend to fail. He comforted himself almost feverishly, with that thought which had come to him before. He had been in tight corners in the past and had got out of them: now, perhaps, he was in the tightest corner of them all, but his luck had not deserted him. He would get out of this.

Quickly he ran his hand through the pockets of the dead man. He found there what he might have expected to find. A gold watch and chain in the waistcoat: some loose cash in one trouser pocket, but in the other his light fingers closed upon a key. This he withdrew and as he looked at it he realized, with a sudden leap of joy, that his luck indeed had not deserted him. For here was a key similar to one which he knew reposed within his own pocket, the key of his room in that hotel. The only difference lay in the fact that this key bore another number, and for a few moments, kneeling there beside the body of the dead man, Fletcher stared at it thoughtfully. Gradually his brain realized the significance of the number: his own key was numbered thirty-seven: the number on the key in his hand, the key which he had taken from the pocket of the dead man before him, was one hundred and thirty-seven. Once again Fletcher's eyes narrowed. Once again he was deep in thought.

Through his mind raced memories of all the hotels he had patronized, then returned again to that which housed him at the moment. And the more he thought, the more certain did he become that the dawning idea within his brain, provoked by that key lying in the palm of his hand, was indeed a good one. For as his own room was numbered thirty-seven and lay on the first floor, what more likely than that number one hundred and thirty-seven should be situated immediately above his own upon the next floor, just as room number two hundred and thirty-seven would probably lie directly above that again upon the third floor. In most hotels of any size, as he well knew, the rooms were numbered up to one hundred upon the first floor, up to two hundred upon the second and so on throughout the building. And as this realization came to him James Fletcher smiled : for from his knowledge of the man who lay dead upon the floor, he felt assured that he had made little trouble when, upon arriving at the hotel, he had discovered Fletcher's impersonation, discovered also that Fletcher was now occupying the room which Dickson had reserved for himself. He was fairly certain that Dickson would have engaged another room with little fuss, merely remarking, perhaps, that a mistake must have been made. Obviously it was thus that he had discovered which room Fletcher was occupying. Probably he had gone up to his own room, settled his things there, and then, thinking the moment opportune, had come down to visit Fletcher. Again Fletcher smiled. He had made his last visit : his appointment had been with death. Well, not a bad riddance, either.

But even as these thoughts came to him Fletcher had made up his mind. His first idea was that it must appear that Dickson had committed suicide, and to obtain that effect it was obvious that his body should be taken back to his own room. Fletcher rose to his feet. He had replaced all the articles which had lain in the dead man's pockets, just as he had found them. All except one—the key which he still held in his hand.

Fletcher moved to the window. He looked out of it at the grey pile which was that well-known clubhouse, at the great stretch of green which was the most famous golf course in the world. But he could see little of that green. Stretched right from the first tee, just out of his sight, to the first green behind the Swilcan Burn, there was a black mass of people. Men with flags were running about attempting to control them. Fletcher remembered having been told that for this great match of the week, for this match which had been eagerly looked forward to by golfing enthusiasts for such a considerable time, many had journeyed from neighbouring cities to witness the struggle.

Cyril Tolley was about to drive off against Bobby Jones and it was the general opinion—once again Fletcher remembered—that the winner in this combat would be the eventual winner of the championship. Could the Englishman check the series of successes which the American was enjoying ? Could Cyril Tolley hold on to the Amateur Championship, retain his title, against the American challenge ? All Dundee, which was enjoying its half-holiday, seemed to have come to the classic course. All Edinburgh seemed to have joined forces. A narrow pathway from tee to green, true, had been kept by the stewards waving their little red flags, but everywhere else apparently, the black spots were swarming. Dundee and Edinburgh were in force. And—and in this lay the comforting thought to Fletcher—not only were Edinburgh and Dundee in force upon the golf course, but also all St. Andrews, man, woman and child.

Again Fletcher smiled. He knew very well that in the hotel no one who could possibly get away to watch the match had failed to do so: he knew very well also that those whom duty had compelled to remain, were hanging out of the windows in front of the building and watching as much as they could see of the contest.

The time could not have been better chosen for his purpose. Fletcher turned once more from the window and looked at the dead man lying on his back as he had left him.

"The moment was opportune, my friend," he said. "You chose very well indeed."

But he hesitated no more. Moving quickly to the door of the room he opened it and cautiously looked out. As he had expected the passage was deserted. Almost immediately opposite to him was the gate of the lift: it was of automatic design, and Fletcher stepped across to it and pressed the button which summoned it. The machinery was set in motion. Evidently the lift had been left on the ground floor, for in a very short time the light had come opposite his door. Fletcher opened the door of the lift and leaving it ajar he quickly retraced his steps to his own room and with care lifted the body of Dickson in his arms and moved towards the door. This required a fairly considerable effort, for although Fletcher was by no means a small man, yet Dickson had been very much of the same size—a fact upon which Fletcher had previously congratulated himself in that it made the impersonation all the more easy.

As he approached the door Fletcher hardened his nerves for the ordeal in front of him. Standing with his back to the passage he looked out, but again there was no sign of anybody : there was, in fact, no sound of life in the whole hotel. Crossing the passage in a flash Fletcher deposited his gruesome burden on the floor of the lift, taking care that no stain of blood could possibly disfigure the ground. He then shut the outside door and moved the gate. But even as he did so a sudden thought came to him. If he were to make it appear as suicide he must leave the revolver which had caused the death near the body, and also make quite sure that Dickson's fingerprints should be found upon it. He cursed himself for a fool. He must not act too quickly, so quickly that he should forget a single detail. Quickly pushing back the gate he reopened the door of the lift and leaving it ajar, so that no one from any other floor could summon it in his absence, he crossed the passage again, re-entered his room and ran to the pistol which was still lying where he had dropped it upon the mat in front of the fireplace. But just as he got half-way a sound came to him, a sound so ghastly in its significance that he stopped dead in his tracks. For he had heard a door slam behind him, he had heard the one sound which, in its unexpectedness, could utterly ruin his plan.

For a few seconds, seconds which seemed an age, Fletcher stood there motionless, all power of movement gone from him, the sweat pouring from his forehead, his hands shaking as if in an ague. But then, with an effort which was almost superhuman, he pulled himself together. Now was not the time to lose his head: any delay might be fatal. He turned. The slamming of that door might be someone, late for the match, hurrying downstairs in order to catch a glimpse of the players as they drove off the first tee, and if that were so, if this person were hurrying, then what more natural than that he or she should use the lift ? Fletcher ran to the door of his room and looked out quickly. For a moment he heaved a sigh of relief, a relief which was really heartfelt for there was no sign of anyone in the passage. But then his horror returned to him with redoubled intensity, perhaps because of the short-lived relief which had been such a fool's paradise . . . for he saw which door it was which had slammed—it was the door of the lift itself.

In one bound Fletcher was across the passage and standing by this door, and even as he did so the light of the lift itself began to move, and he realized that he was too late, for the lift had started to descend.

In moments of great crisis the thoughts of a man very often race through his brain with a speed which would surprise him in normal times. Just such a happening occurred now to Fletcher. He realized at once what must have taken place. The door of the lift had slammed to and someone, standing at that moment on the landing below, had pressed the button to summon it. In response to this the lift had descended, a fact which would have been impossible had the door remained open. Was luck turning against him ? Fletcher refused to consider the thought. A look of grim determination came into his face and for a moment he thought wildly of flight, but then a better plan came to him, a plan which might conceivably save him yet. And even as he stood there thinking so rapidly that his brain was in a whirl, but thinking quite coherently, a sound came from below, a sound which he had dreaded to hear, a sound which shattered his nerves afresh. For a woman screamed and the sound was carried to him through the lift shaft, so that he could hear it quite distinctly.

But as he stood there he heard another sound—the slamming of a door. Very rapidly Fletcher visualized what had occurred. A woman had summoned the lift by pressing the button ; a woman had opened the door on its arrival and had seen the ghastly sight upon the floor; a woman had screamed for fear, and panic-stricken, had slammed the door in order to shut away the grim sight. And in that moment Fletcher acted. For his fingers shot to the button at the side of the door and pressed it, and to his immense relief he knew that his surmise had been correct. For the lift began to work again. One hand still pressing the button, the other on the handle of the door which he knew could not open until the lift ascended to it, Fletcher waited. As the lift came opposite, as it stopped, he turned the handle and the door opened. It took him but a second to step inside and but another second to close the door. In a moment the lift was moving, for he had pressed the button, the button marked two, for the floor above.

From this moment Fletcher acted perhaps by instinct, but as methodically as if he had thought out every action beforehand. On arriving at the next floor he opened the door, lifted his gruesome burden and with one quick glance around to make quite sure that no one was lurking in the passage, he stepped from the lift and shut the door, but not without a glance behind to assure himself that no sign or trace of the lifeless passenger which it had so recently contained had been left as evidence. Propping up the body of Dickson with his left hand, Fletcher felt in his pocket for the man's key, found it and opened the door of number one hundred and thirty-seven. As he had surmised it was directly above his own and opposite the door of the lift. Pushing open the door he looked in. There was no one there and it was obvious that luggage had been very recently brought to the room, for it had not yet been arranged or unpacked, but lay haphazard about the floor.

Quickly Fletcher stepped in, closed the door and placed the sprawling body of his victim in a chair. He then locked the door, replaced the key in his pocket and stared around once more. Almost immediately his eyes became riveted on a big travelling-trunk which he remembered having noticed in Dickson's cabin when they had been journeying together on the boat to Marseilles. And in that moment there came to him his great idea.

To pretend that Dickson had committed suicide was now to court disaster, for he might fail to set the tableau in a manner sufficiently realistic to convince the law. And also—this was the nagging thought which refused to depart from his mind—someone had screamed . . . someone had screamed . . . someone had seen the corpse. No longer was there a hope that it might pass as suicide. The body must disappear.

Fletcher smiled to himself. Far better let Dickson remain alive in the eyes of the world.

Even as his eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he stared at the trunk, even as a plan evolved with magical swiftness in his brain, Fletcher seemed to recover the jaunty confidence which was habitual to him. Yes—he had got out of trouble before: he would get out of trouble again.

And as he stood there, a crafty smile playing about his lips, Fletcher heard through the open window the voice of Alexander, the starter, ring out his prelude to the match. The one word "Fore" echoed gently through the room, far more gently than it did along the fairway to scatter those of the great crowd who still were uncontrolled. The great match was about to start.

Fletcher's grim match with the vengeance of the law had already started.

CHAPTER III

Marilyn's Moment of Fear

A GOLF championship should be so much a matter for mere man only, so much a sporting event in which the advent of a woman might even be resented by those participating, that a certain fact is a constant tribute to the tremendous power of the jestingly called weaker sex. A pretty girl can sometimes cause even the very best of golfers to commit that cardinal error—the removal of the optic from the little white sphere.

That Miss Marilyn Gaynor was quite unconscious, however, of the stir which she was causing around her, was very obvious to the eye. She was standing at the top of the steps close to the clubhouse, steps which lead out to the golf course, those steps which are so very near to the last green at St. Andrews, scene of so many nerve-shattering endings to famous matches.

There were many standing around. The course itself was black with people waiting for the start of the great match of the week, and many curious glances were cast in her direction, glances not unmingled with admiration. For this girl, as she stood there at the top of the steps, so oblivious of the effect her presence had produced in the hearts of young and old alike (for when is a man too old to admire a pretty girl ?), presented a picture calculated to remain for a considerable period of time imprinted in the minds of those who saw her.

She was dark, tall and slender. She was dressed in a country suit of tweed which set off to perfection her figure, and which was exactly in keeping with her evident intention of watching a match on the links. And yet, although in this costume she would appear to be the perfect country girl, something about her whole appearance made every man wonder whether she would not be even more attractive in the silks and satins of the evening.

Negligently she descended the steps, still looking about her, and those who were near made way as they might make way for honoured royalty. There is nothing, after all, so regal as youth allied to beauty ; but the girl was quite unaware of the admiration which she was provoking, unaware even of the challenge which her very presence in that place constituted to the supremacy of the game to which the ground was dedicated. Evidently she was looking for someone, for she kept casting her eyes around, and even as they rested for a moment on those about her, each male prepared to smile ; not because he was daring the liberty, but merely because it seemed the natural thing to do in grateful response for the privilege of such a glance. But her eyes rested not long enough on any one person for this to be carried into effect. She was looking for some definite person, and this was no easy task, for several thousand were on the golf course, several thousand specimens of sporting humanity, nearly all of whom were hoping that the greatest American golfer of all time, perhaps the greatest golfer in the world, would just this once meet with his Waterloo.

She moved forward a few paces, still intent upon her quest, when a man disengaged himself from the group in which he was standing and moved over to her.

" Well, my dear," he said, and his voice was kindly. " Got lost, or what ? "

The girl smiled. It was a smile of real pleasure, and although her words belied it at once, yet the impression might have been obtained by a casual onlooker that this was the man for whom she had been seeking.

" Oh ! Mr. Malcolm," she said. " I was looking for Noel Venn. What a crowd ! "

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm. " If I know anything of that young man he will be at the very forefront of this mass of people, in the very best place obtainable. I suppose," went on Mr. Malcolm, " that all journalists, all good journalists that is, have that faculty. No matter the crowd, no matter the difficulties, they always achieve the best possible place. But "—and Mr. Malcolm smiled mischievously

—" how is it that you are not there beside him sharing the result of his prowess ? "

The girl smiled.

" Don't tease me, Mr. Malcolm," she said. " The reason is perfectly clear. I told him that I'd meet him in front of the clubhouse ten minutes ago, and of course I was late."

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm, " you can't keep a journalist waiting. You ought to know that, my dear young lady. Especially in a crowd like this, and when he has an important job to do."

The girl looked about her again.

" What a crowd ! " she repeated. " Where do they all come from ? "

" I'm told," said Mr. Malcolm, " that there's a half holiday in Dundee. I should say," he added, " that there are a great many grandmothers recently deceased in Edinburgh, and the inhabitants of St. Andrews don't seem even to have bothered to have produced that well-worn excuse—they're merely just here."

The girl laughed.

" Yes—all of them," she said. " I've just come from the hotel and it's absolutely deserted."

" My dear Marilyn," said Mr. Malcolm, " not only is it deserted but so is every other house in St. Andrews—in the county, perhaps. Possibly in Scotland. It may never happen again that Cyril Tolley, as holder of the championship, will be playing Bobby Jones over eighteen holes. Who do you think will win ? "

The girl smiled.

"Fancy you asking me that, Mr. Malcolm! You—with your love of golf: you—with your knowledge of players. Whatever I say won't make the slightest difference to your opinion. Tell me, what is it?"

"I think," said Mr. Malcolm, "that Bobby Jones will win. I understand, although I haven't the privilege of knowing him, that he is a charming person, but all the same, for this one occasion in the year I wish him all the bad luck in the world. I should like Cyril Tolley to win more than I can say. It might do something to bring back our shattered golf prestige. But still, who knows. In three hours' time the riddle will have been solved. All I can hope is that the match will be close."

"Yes," said the girl, but she was not listening. Mr. Malcolm saw that. She was looking around her again, continuing her quest, which he had interrupted. Mr. Malcolm smiled to himself.

"You'll never find him now," he said, "unless you are terribly lucky. He'll be running from place to place, watching the match."

"How long will they be before they start?" she asked suddenly.

"If they start to time," said Mr. Malcolm, looking at his watch, "which presumably they will—in about another quarter of an hour."

"Goodness!" she said, "he did want me to meet him early."

"All journalists," said Mr. Malcolm, "are punctual for their own appointments, but only for their own appointments. Never mind, I'll help you find him if you like."

"Well," said the girl, "the chances don't look very favourable, do they? I think the best thing to do would be to take up a position somewhere behind the first green and watch through my field-glasses. In which case"—she stopped and turned to him smilingly—"I suppose I'd better take advantage of that precious fifteen minutes and go and fetch them."

"The time could not be better employed," said Mr. Malcolm. "I'll wait for you here, if you like."

"Oh, no, Mr. Malcolm. You mustn't do that," she laughed. "I know how keen you are. I'll find you later."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

"My poor efforts at being polite," he remarked, "have been received, I see, with fitting sincerity. Thank you very much, I shan't wait for you. Good-bye, my dear."

The girl turned and moved quickly up the steps again, back to the hotel in which she was staying. She entered its portals and moved over to the lift. This was of automatic design and she pressed the button to summon it. Nothing happened, and the girl breathed a sigh of annoyance: had somebody been such a fool as to leave the door open on one of the floors above so that the mechanism would not work? But even as this thought came to her, and as she almost turned to move towards the staircase, she heard a door slam above her. Again she pressed the button, and this time she saw the rope which dangled below the lift begin to move in the shaft. As the light came opposite to her she placed one hand upon the door, pulled it open, and took a step forward.

The girl was in a hurry. But that one step forward was the only one she took. She remained staring at the floor of the lift in front of her, staring with eyes which were now dilated with fear and horror. Her hand still grasped the handle of the door which she had just opened: her face had lost all vestige of colour: her lips opened but there came no sound from between them. She remained staring, utterly unable to believe her eyes, utterly unable to realize the horror that they told her brain was lying huddled in the corner of that lift in front of her.

And then, after that moment of paralysed fear, after that moment in which she had been unable to move, to speak, to do anything at all, suddenly there came back to her full power of movement. But it was panic power. She could move, she could speak again—but she was terrified. From between her lips came that scream which she had been unable to utter before, that scream which had been delayed by the shock of what her eyes had seen—and then, stepping back abruptly, she swung the door to, so that it slammed and shut.

Turning on her heel, she ran as fast as she could across the lounge towards the office of the hotel.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Malcolm forgets his Tea

MR. MALCOLM walked in a leisurely manner from the golf course to the hotel. His mind was full of admiration for the players in the great game which he had just witnessed. That the American had won in no way spoilt his pleasure, for intensely patriotic though he was, yet Mr. Malcolm felt that in this defeat the Englishman had achieved much glory. The match had gone to the nineteenth hole, there to be settled by a stymie, and even with the fact that at the seventeenth all the luck had gone against Tolley, yet Mr. Malcolm had the feeling that the best man had won. How they could have played in the scrambling, rushing crowd : how they could have kept their nerves in control when they had had to wait sometimes for ten minutes to play a shot while the crowd was being restrained, were mysteries to Mr. Malcolm, whom one pair of eyes could seriously disturb if they were directed at him when he was making his own efforts. The match had been the most exciting in Mr. Malcolm's experience, and he earnestly wondered whether ever before such golf had been played upon so important an occasion. If another blow had been struck at British golf, yet it was a defeat which brought with it almost as much glory as victory would have done.

Mr. Malcolm felt mildly tired. He had come up there to enjoy a holiday and to watch golf played as he could never hope to play it, but his great keenness for the game made it possible for him to enjoy watching an expert at work as much as if he himself were making his passes at the ball, and he felt that the spectacle which he had just witnessed was by itself quite sufficient to reward him for his expedition.

The whole atmosphere of St. Andrews, too, pleased him. It was pleasant to be informed that the Post Office was but a half iron up the street, or that the church was but a full brassie east, rather than to be told that each respectively were but one hundred and fifty yards, or just over a furlong.

Mr. Malcolm mounted the steps which led from the course to the gravel enclosure round the clubhouse. Crossing this he advanced along the road to his hotel and entered it. Mr. Malcolm breathed a sigh of relief. The atmosphere of the hotel, uncrowded, as most of the spectators were still on the links, was pleasantly quiet after the scramble of the last three hours. Mr. Malcolm felt definitely tired. He had found it necessary to run sometimes to get a good position, but he had enjoyed himself. It had been well worth it. Now a cup of tea would do much to soothe him.

He advanced across the lounge and took up a position in an armchair in a corner, for which, since he had been in St. Andrews, he had established his claim. A waitress soon came to him and he gave his order. Then he leant back and half-closed his eyes, the better to remember some of the incidents of the match which he had just witnessed. So concentrated did he become in this pleasant retrospect that it was with quite a start that he suddenly realized that a man was standing in front of him. He looked up and recognized the manager of the hotel.

" Ah," said Mr. Malcolm pleasantly, " a great match, wasn't it ? "

" Yes, sir. May I have a word with you ? "

Mr. Malcolm looked up, astonished at the other's voice. The man, usually so suave and calm, seemed somewhat fussed. He was ill at ease. Mr. Malcolm, accustomed to notice these little things about his fellow beings, was interested. Evidently something had happened, something very disturbing, for now that Mr. Malcolm looked at his face, he could see that the manager was worried.

" Of course you can, my dear fellow. What can I do for you ? "

" If you wouldn't mind coming into my office, Mr. Malcolm, just for a few moments. I won't detain you, but I should like your advice."

Mr. Malcolm immediately rose to his feet.

" I've just ordered some tea," he said. " After that—or . . . ? "

" I'll tell them to bring it to the office."

Surprised, rather interested, Mr. Malcolm followed the manager to his private office. As soon as the door had closed upon them the man sat down at his desk and with a wave of his hand proffered to Mr. Malcolm the only armchair. Mr. Malcolm gratefully accepted it.

" You will excuse me, Mr. Malcolm," started the manager. " I know you are on holiday, but I really am in need of help."

Mr. Malcolm stiffened. The suggestion behind the words was obvious. Mr. Malcolm disliked the inference it created.

" You are accustomed, Mr. Malcolm, to deal with matters of a . . . of a . . ."

He paused : he was in a difficulty. Mr. Malcolm helped him out.

" Of a disturbing nature ? " he suggested.

The other smiled.

" Yes. You are accustomed to deal with these matters, Mr. Malcolm, and I am not. When a man who has not previously come face to face with tragedy, or with . . ."

Again he paused.

" Crime ? " suggested Mr. Malcolm.

" Or with crime, it is difficult to know how to act."

" Not in the least," said Mr. Malcolm. " Ring up the police."

" Yes," said the manager, " but supposing that there is a very grave doubt as to whether any crime has been committed ? "

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm. " I don't follow you. Make yourself clear."

" A most extraordinary thing happened in the hotel this afternoon," said the manager quietly, but there was something in his tone which carried conviction, something which riveted Mr. Malcolm's attention to his every word. " Everyone, or nearly everyone, was out of the hotel at the time. It was just before the match started. Miss Gaynor, the lady who sits with your party . . ."

" Yes, yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " cut out the obvious."

" Very well, sir. Miss Gaynor came back to the hotel some ten minutes after leaving it, having forgotten something. She went to the lift. I'm telling you her story."

" Yes, yes," said Mr. Malcolm. " Get on with it."

" You know it's automatic. She set it in motion and when it descended she opened the door. She was about to step in and go up to her room when she saw on the floor of the lift the body of a dead man . . ."

" Just one moment," said Mr. Malcolm, without the slightest hesitation. " How did she know he was dead ? "

" He had come to a violent death," said the manager, " or at least that is the inference, for he was huddled in a corner but his face could be clearly seen. It had no colour, the eyes were glazed, and . . ."

" He might have been in a faint," said Mr. Malcolm.

" He might," said the manager, " but he had blood trickling from the side of his mouth."

" He still might have been in a faint—or, perhaps, a fit," said Mr. Malcolm.

The manager looked at Mr. Malcolm irritably.

" Look here, sir," he said. " I'm only telling you the story as told to me by Miss Gaynor. I didn't see him."

" No," said Mr. Malcolm, soothingly. " I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cast any doubt on to the story. I believe every word that you've told me. But you see it's a mistake to assume that crime has occurred when one is not absolutely certain."

" I quite see that," said the manager, " and that is part of my trouble."

" What did Miss Gaynor do ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" She screamed. That part of the story I am quite certain about," said the manager, " for I heard her myself. I was sitting in the office finishing some accounts as quickly as I could in order to go out and see the match. She slammed the door in order to shut out the horrible sight and she ran to me. For a few moments she could not make herself coherent, but finally I got the story out of her and leaving her in the office I rushed to the lift. Someone on one of the upstairs landings had actuated the machinery, for it was no longer on the ground floor."

" What did you do then ? " said Mr. Malcolm.

" I'm afraid, sir, you will tell me that I was stupid, but you must remember that I was acting under very great stress. It is not pleasant for a manager of an hotel to be told that someone has died a violent death in the establishment under his control. I pressed the button and the lift came down."

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm.

" When the lift came opposite to me I must confess that I hesitated for a second before opening the door. I didn't exactly relish the thought of seeing the sight which had been described to me so vividly by the young lady, but I eventually nerved myself to do what I knew was my duty—and I pulled open the door."

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm again.

The manager paused. For a few moments Mr. Malcolm allowed him to assemble his thoughts, then he prompted him again.

" And what did you see ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Nothing at all," said the manager.

" Nothing at all ? "

" Well—the inside of the lift."

" Of course," said Mr. Malcolm, with a smile. " But I mean—no body ? "

" Nothing," said the manager. " It was then that I realized I had been stupid. I should have gone upstairs and found the lift wherever it had stopped. This I proceeded to do now. I ran up the stairs and looked at every landing, but there was no one anywhere to be seen. It was then that I began to doubt Miss Gaynor's story."

"To doubt it?"

Mr. Malcolm looked surprised.

"Yes, you see although she had been very definite as to what she had seen, the fact remained that there was nothing in that lift and no sign of any stain of blood or anything of that sort. And yet if what she had described to me were true, either the man had met with a violent death or he had been suffering from some form of fit or faintness. In the first assumption he could not have moved out of that lift by himself, and if someone else had moved him surely he would have left some trace. In the second he could scarcely have recovered himself so quickly, in the short space of time in which it took Miss Gaynor to give me a rough idea of what had happened, to have risen to his feet and actuated the lift. And then a curious thing happened. Unwilling to leave anything to chance I went round every room of the hotel myself, starting from the top and working right down to the bottom . . ."

"Why did you start from the top?" asked Mr. Malcolm suddenly.

"I don't know. I thought it more likely

that if anything had happened it would have been at the top of the hotel. You see, the lift had gone up."

" How do you know that ? " said Mr. Malcolm.

" Because," said the manager, " when I actuated it again after Miss Gaynor had told me the story, it came down, and took some time to come down."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm. " Very wise. Well ? "

" I looked in every room of the hotel . . ."

" Just one moment," said Mr. Malcolm. " That took you some little time ? "

" It did," said the manager. " I missed the match." He smiled ruefully. " However, I hope you will tell me all about that later, Mr. Malcolm."

" How many rooms are there on a landing ? "

" There are supposed to be a hundred," said the manager. " The numbers go up a hundred to each floor. Actually there are not quite so many."

" What did you find ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" I found no one at all."

" No one ? "

" Not a soul. Every single person in the hotel must have been out on the links."

" No room disturbed ? "

" No room disturbed."

" What did you do then ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" I came down to the office again," said the manager, " and I confess I was a little severe with the young lady. I examined her and cross-examined her, but now she was much more normal. She had recovered from the shock, but she stuck to her story . . . to every word of it. I decided there was only one thing to do."

" What was that ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Wait," said the manager. " Wait until everyone had returned . . . wait until I could find if anyone was missing."

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm, " rather a waste of time, but perhaps . . . er . . . inevitable."

" Yes."

" And has everyone turned up ? "

" Not yet," said the manager, " but I thought I'd like to tell you, Mr. Malcolm. You must excuse me if I am taking advantage of your reputation. We know who you are : we know that you have been successful in collaboration with the police on many occasions. We are hoping that should anything occur to follow this extraordinary event you will help us. In about an hour we should know."

Mr. Malcolm did not answer for a few moments.

" I am on holiday, as you know," he said, " but still . . . if anything should develop I shall be pleased to do what I can. Er . . . about Miss Gaynor . . . is she still worried ? Is she still upset ? "

" She went to her room," said the manager. " I don't think she's been down since. I saw

Mr. Venn come in a few moments before you did and noticed that he went upstairs. I have a feeling that they may be together."

Mr. Malcolm looked at the manager expecting to see a smile on his face, for it was well known throughout the hotel that the young journalist was very much attracted by this girl. But there was no smile on his face. Mr. Malcolm paused, then he looked up and when he spoke his voice was sharp.

" She won't tell this story to anyone, I suppose, until . . ."

" Until we've verified whether anyone is missing in the hotel ? "

" Yes."

" I've asked her not to, Mr. Malcolm, but Mr. Venn is a journalist."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm quietly. " I think I'll go upstairs."

He rose to his feet and left the room.

Mr. Malcolm would have been flattered had he seen the expression on the face of the manager, for there was a look of intense relief shining in his eyes.

Mr. Malcolm walked across the lounge, quite forgetting his tea, and straight up the stairs, and there was something purposeful about his progress.

CHAPTER V

Fletcher is Confident

JAMES FLETCHER travelled the last two miles of his journey on foot, and as he walked into St. Andrews he noticed that the streets were still crowded and that a steady stream of people seemed to be making its way towards the railway station. He smiled to himself. The great match had indeed been of infinite use to him, had, in fact, perhaps saved his life. He felt, strangely enough, no remorse for his deed. He was glad that things had turned out the way they had. He walked along jauntily. Entire confidence had returned to him: he felt that his luck was in, and when he felt that, James Fletcher was definitely on top of the world.

Suddenly it occurred to him that it was essential he should know the result of the match and also something about it. He looked at his watch and found that it was just possible to get a drink. As he walked along he saw several potential customers enter a public house, and he decided to mingle with them. He walked in and taking up an unobtrusive vantage-point near the end of the bar, ordered himself half a pint of beer and sat down to listen. It was not long before he had the whole story: how the crowd had been rather out of hand: how the players had been delayed in their shots and yet how they had risen above such difficulties and had played the game of their lives. Praise was high for Cyril Tolley no less than for the winner, for it was felt that the match had been so close that either might have won, and that luck, perhaps, had been just a little with the American. Yet it was noticeable that the name of Jones was being bandied about rather as though he were an Englishman himself and as if the battle that had just been waged had not been international in character. Here, indeed, was a great tribute to the American who, it seemed commonly agreed, was the best golfer in the world.

Satisfied that he had now obtained all the knowledge that he required, James Fletcher left the public house and continued his walk until he reached his hotel.

He entered.

The lounge was full, but chiefly with the female relatives of those visiting the place. Fletcher smiled to himself. No doubt their males were now in the clubhouse discussing the match in their own way. With a resolute step James Fletcher walked straight to the lift. He knew that he had to go through this ordeal, for if anyone was watching it was essential that he should do nothing not in accordance with his usual habits.

Fletcher pressed the button and the lift began to move. As he waited he looked around and noticed the manager standing a few feet away. He smiled and nodded and his salutation was respectfully acknowledged. Fletcher was pleased. As he had walked back those last two miles he had wondered whether he would feel disturbed at sight of this lift, but now he was proving to himself that he had a great control over his nerves. This increased his confidence, for he felt in no way disturbed even at the thought which the lift inevitably recalled to him, of those stirring moments of a few hours before.

The lift came to a stop : he opened the door, stepped in and shut it behind him. He pressed the button to the first floor and the lift took him there. He advanced to his own room and let himself in. Shutting the door behind him he moved over to the mat and looked down at it. A small dark stain was easily discernible. Fletcher frowned. He knew that this was his next job, but he had his idea all ready. When he had gone up to his victim's room he had noticed that the furniture there had been similar to that in his own room, and thus had surmised that the furnishing of the hotel was uniform throughout.

Fletcher set to work. Very carefully he rubbed the mat with a handkerchief to which he had generously applied soap and water. Again he felt surprise at his own superb self-control. He was in no way nervous or perturbed. The action he was now engaged in—that of removing the bloodstain made by a man whom he himself had murdered—filled him with no repugnance, with no smallest tremor of revulsion. He made quite a good job of it, rinsing the water into the basin when he had finished. There was no hot and cold water laid on to the rooms in the hotel: it was not sufficiently modern for that, but Fletcher felt in no way handicapped. On the verandah leading from the french windows of his room, there was a window-box. Into this Fletcher carefully poured the water from his basin, then making a hole in the earth with his fingers, he pushed the handkerchief he had just been using, down . . . down . . . until it was entirely out of sight. Smoothing the earth once more so that no change could be discerned, Fletcher surveyed it carefully and decided that, for the moment, he could not have chosen a better hiding-place. When he left the hotel—which he proposed to do as soon as it would be safe for him to go—the handkerchief would leave with him, but in the meantime it was skilfully concealed. No suspicious hurry. That must be his watchword.

He then walked to the door, opened it and closed it behind him. Nonchalantly he moved along the passage to the other end and back again. He did this for two reasons. Partly in order to make quite certain that no one was about, that people were still eagerly discussing the great match of the day: and partly so as to make sure of his next move. One door only a few rooms away, was open, and as he walked back Fletcher suddenly knocked on it and looked in. It was empty, and his heart gave a sudden leap as he noticed that the furnishings of this room were identical with those in his own.

Quickly he moved across to the fireplace; quickly he lifted the rug which lay before it, and walking boldly out he carried it to his own room. No one had seen him: of that he was convinced. Placing this rug before his fireplace he removed his own, the one which he had been at such pains to clean, and tucking this under his arm he walked to the door, looked cautiously about and saw again that the coast was clear. This time, however, he did not walk in his usual manner. So anxious was he to complete this perilous and most unpleasant business that he ran the distance between the two rooms and placed the mat before the fireplace of the room he had just raided. Then returning and leaving the door as much ajar as it had been when he had first noticed it, he walked back to his own room and shut himself in.

He moved over to a chair and sat down. He was surprised to notice that he felt hot all over, and that perspiration was beginning to form upon his brow. The affair was taking more out of him than he had supposed and he longed for some stimulant to soothe his nerves. But he felt that it would be a mistake to do anything that was uncommon to his usual habits, and so he refrained from ringing the bell for a waiter. Instead he lit a cigarette and inhaled luxuriously. This did him good. For a few moments longer he remained thus: he was pleased with himself: he had forgotten nothing. His, indeed, was a perfect murder, although it had been an unpremeditated one. He found himself wondering why he had succumbed to that moment of madness in pulling that trigger, and once again he looked down at the first finger of his right hand and marvelled how it could have been so stupid as to have tightened on the steel lever and sent that messenger of death. For again Fletcher told himself that he had had nothing to fear from Dickson. He could have bluffed it all out, for the man had had no legal redress.

However, the deed was done, and Fletcher assured himself that in a way he was pleased. For certainly there would have been an unpleasant scene, which might have had uncomfortable consequences.

As he sat there deep in his thoughts Fletcher realized that there was still one thing left for him to do, and then, indeed, all traces would have gone and it would be absolutely impossible for his guilt to be brought home to him. He must clean the automatic pistol which had fired that shot, clean the barrel so that no one could prove that any shot had been fired.

He must get rid of the spent cartridge case which was still in the chamber.

Fletcher moved over to the writing-desk at which he had been seated when the unfortunate Dickson had entered that room. He sat down in the chair and was about to pull open a drawer when it occurred to him that he had better make quite certain that he would not be disturbed. Rising to his feet he moved swiftly to the door and locked it, then returning to the desk he pulled open the drawer in which he had placed the automatic. Picking this up he looked at it and again as he fingered it, as his forefinger automatically caressed the trigger, he wondered whether he ought not to rid himself of this weapon, or at least keep it unloaded ; for then it could never again get him into such terrible trouble. But with an impatient gesture Fletcher realized that he was wasting time. The milk was spilt now and there was no use in crying.

Quickly, with abrupt movements, he opened the weapon and withdrew the cartridge clip. This he placed on the desk in front of him, and holding the pistol up to the light he looked through the barrel.

Fletcher sat motionless. He could not understand what his eyes told him had happened.

The barrel was gleaming as a barrel only gleams when it is perfectly clean.

Fletcher's fingers suddenly ceased to function. With a clatter the instrument of death dropped from his hand on to the desk in front of him. Fletcher realized that he felt cold, that he felt ill, that he felt old. Fletcher picked up the clip of cartridges.

It was complete. No shot had been fired from that gun that day.

Fletcher collapsed in his chair.

CHAPTER VI

Fletcher's Smile Broadens

TEN minutes elapsed, ten minutes during which no sound was heard in that room numbered thirty-seven. Indeed, there was no one within who could have made any disturbing noise, for its sole occupant crouched senseless in his chair before the writing-desk. The tiny clock upon the mantelpiece ticked the minutes steadily away until they numbered ten, and then a slight dawn of colour crept into the ashen face. His eyelids quivered . . . opened . . . and in quick succession came the unmistakable movements of rapidly returning consciousness.

A second or so later James Fletcher lifted his head and stared around him. To begin with, his gaze was vacant, mystified: but as his eyes roved dazedly about, falling at last upon the pistol at his feet, the vacancy vanished and in its place there came a look which had but rarely darkened the features of this man.

Horror, fear and remorse fought for mastery in his eyes . . . but remorse was predominant. For James Fletcher knew that to-day he had acted with the suicidal folly of a madman;

had taken, in fact, the most infinite precautions to fasten about his own neck that halter which another hand had earned. Each of those far-seeing actions which he had been at such pains to take to clear himself had been but proofs as to his own need for clearance. None but a guilty man would have been so certain that his own hand had committed the deed of murder. And James Fletcher realized that, as he had watched his enemy enter that room, murder must have been seething within his heart : in his heart, but not within his brain, for the hand which had fired that shot had not been his own.

Yet who would believe it now ? Who, knowing the care he had taken to hide this deed, would lend any but an incredulous ear to a true statement of the facts as they had happened ? Had he but spoken at the time, informed the manager within a few moments of Dickson's falling, then, indeed, nothing could have been proved against him—or very little. The facts of the impersonation, possibly, might have come to light, though even that was doubtful. But that he had been innocent of this vital thing it would not have been difficult for him to prove. Whereas now . . . and with despairing clearness James Fletcher realized the utter hopelessness of his own position.

Rising shakily from his chair he moved over to the window and stared out at the tiny verandah beyond. It was here, hidden from sight behind the curtained window-panes, that the unknown slayer must have been standing when he had fired the shot that killed. To reach this verandah from the pavement would not have been difficult, the room being situated upon the first floor ; and as he realized this fact Fletcher moaned aloud, a moan that was eloquent of all the bitterness that lay within his soul . . . for had Dickson but reserved a room upon the second storey the whole affair might never have occurred.

And as he pondered this fact another thought came to him, a thought which sent the returning colour fleeing from his face once more with lightning swiftness. For the killer had been hidden behind the windows of his room. How could Fletcher be sure that the shot had indeed reached the target it was meant for ? How could he be convinced that it was really at Dickson that the bullet had been aimed ? And as this thought came to him James Fletcher shivered. Although a brave man, brave, perhaps, because his imagination was not too robust, the thought that the person who had climbed that waterpipe leading to his bedroom, climbed it with murder in his heart, might have intended the shot for him was chilling. There had been many dark passages in his past, memories which even he, the prime mover in them all, cared not to recall, which had furnished this man with at least half a dozen enemies who would glory in his death. What if among this band there had been one who had not stopped at murder ?

With a white face he recalled them all, all those men whose undying hatred he had so grimly earned : the man in Santa Barbara who was called *The Tiger* : the little Frenchman of the Rue Montmartre : the drunken sailor he had ruined in Tunis : the American Jew who was now rich no longer : the cunning little dago whose girl he had stolen. Shadows from his past, dwellers in the lowest haunts of many cities, with hatred gleaming in their phantom eyes they passed before him now—and Fletcher was appalled. For any of these, he knew it well, would have delighted in his death, dared even the hangman's rope could they but have destroyed him.

A chill wind seemed to have sprung up with the gathering twilight : the curtains that hung by the window moved gently as though at the touch of a hidden hand—and James Fletcher shivered. For having discovered his mistake might not the killer shoot again ? With stumbling steps he returned slowly to his chair, sank down into it heavily and remained staring before him with unseeing eyes, his mind intent upon those scarlet pages that were written in his past.

Yet as the minutes passed and as the reassuring sounds of everyday life clamoured about the hotel, bringing him back gradually from the sinister memories of days that had gone to the comforting realities of the moment, James Fletcher began to gain heart once more. The colour returned slowly to his face, and hope—never long absent from his daring, self-confident mind—presented the happenings of that day in a somewhat more pleasant light. That shot had been intended for Dickson—he told himself this, forced the belief firmly into his mind—that shot had killed Dickson . . . and who more likely to have been the killer than the one man in St. Andrews who was fearful of his coming ?

As this thought dawned upon him James Fletcher smiled with cunning satisfaction, a smile which played strangely upon his haggard features. What a tremendous hold he now had over this man, a hold far greater than that which had been the actual reason for his own visit to this town. And as this thought matured within his mind Fletcher's smile broadened : it was now very evil, very unpleasant, for into his soul had crept the triumphant knowledge that never more need he strive and scheme to gain his living : he had now the means whereby support for life would be assured.

Settling himself at ease in his armchair he gloated inwardly, purred almost with anticipatory delight, as roseate visions of his future ease danced luxuriously within his brain.

For Fletcher was a gambler, and like all gamblers he lived ever either upon the heights or in the depths—the ignoble mean he thought was no fit dwelling for his spirit. Thus it was that from an utter despair he had shot up exultantly to a corresponding triumph, become drunk with expectancy before he had yet tasted of the wine . . . before he had yet pondered the inevitable fact that no glass of wine, no matter how rare its vintage, is guiltless of lees . . . and these can be very bitter.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Malcolm explains his Position

MR. MALCOLM knocked at the door and immediately heard Marilyn's voice tell him to enter.

He walked into the room, shutting the door behind him, and in his first glance realized that the fears both of the manager and himself had been justified. Young Noel Venn was standing by the fireplace, Marilyn seated in the armchair beside him, and it would have been obvious to an eye not nearly so well trained as was Mr. Malcolm's that Venn had just been listening to disquieting news, and was quite evidently disturbed by what he had heard. But there was something else about the young man, about his attitude even more than his expression, which told Mr. Malcolm still more, told him that which he had no desire to know. For Venn was on the alert. He looked business-like ; obviously he was not merely disquietened by what he had been told, but also excited. And what more natural, said Mr. Malcolm to himself, than that a journalist should be excited by the copy which had just been presented to him.

" Oh, Mr. Malcolm, I'm so glad you've come."

The girl's voice drew Mr. Malcolm's eyes from the young man standing beside her to the figure seated in the armchair. She had made little movement since he had entered the room, and now for the first time Mr. Malcolm saw the expression on her face. Any doubts which he may have had about the story she had unfolded to the manager and which had been retailed to him, instantly vanished in that moment. As he stared at her Mr. Malcolm had a fleeting memory of her face as he had seen it last, her face when she had bidden him good-bye upon the golf course not so many hours before. Then she had been smiling, smiling with a careless gaiety which was, perhaps, her greatest charm. There had been no shadow of apprehension within her eyes, no lines of fear about her mouth. But as he looked at her now Mr. Malcolm saw that the girl must indeed have suffered a grievous shock. The apprehension and fear were very evident, and as she looked at him there was no pretence at a smile upon her face.

He moved quickly over to the fireplace and took up a position beside Venn.

" My dear . . ." he said.

But he got no further, for the girl interrupted him.

" You've heard ? "

Mr. Malcolm nodded.

" Yes," he said, " the manager called me into the office as soon as I came into the hotel and he told me the whole story. He also told me " —Mr. Malcolm smiled—" that you had promised to say no word about this matter until you were given permission."

Marilyn blushed.

"I've told Noel. He came to me at once, you see. I simply had to tell somebody. I've . . ."

"Yes," said Mr. Malcolm soothingly. "Yes, I know. What more suitable person could you have told? What safer recipient for your secrets than a member of that great profession which can always be trusted?"

Noel Venn looked at Mr. Malcolm sharply. He was not certain whether a note of sarcasm had not crept into the other's voice when he spoke these words, and he was quick to resent any implied slur against the honour of his profession. Mr. Malcolm noticed the young man's movement and he turned and faced him squarely.

"Venn," he said, "every word that I have just uttered I have meant. In the past it has often been my privilege to ask assistance from the Press. I have never failed to receive it. Something suppressed—good copy though it might be: something announced—piece of bluff though it might be. In this case I know you are going to help me."

There was something so pleasant about the way in which Mr. Malcolm expounded this expression of faith that Noel Venn felt himself drawn entirely towards the older man. Just as in that first moment when, uncertain as to the meaning which lay behind the words, he had felt resentment, now that the meaning was clear he almost bristled with pleasure and his very words showed how ready he was to do all that was in his power.

" What do you want me to do ? " he said quietly. " Of course it's a great bit of copy. Championship week—the great match—everyone out on the golf course—a murder committed . . ."

" Why murder ? " asked Mr. Malcolm blandly.

For a moment Noel Venn was stumped, but not for long. His eyes were shining with excitement at the scoop of which he alone had knowledge, by which his paper alone would benefit.

" It must have been a murder, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " The position of the body."

" So you've got that already ? " laughed the other.

" Of course I have. Marilyn told me everything. Whatever the result, it's a great story. It's a mystery . . . it's a head-liner . . . it's . . ."

" Possibly," said Mr. Malcolm, " everything you say, but for the moment, Venn, I want you to keep it all absolutely quiet. In return I promise you that anything which may occur will be reported to you. In fact you will probably know all about it without any necessity for me to tell you, because I propose to ask you to help me in the investigation."

" In the investigation ? "

It was Marilyn who had spoken.

" Of course, my dear." Mr. Malcolm's voice was very gentle : he did not like the pallor, so unnatural to her, still in her cheeks. " There must be an investigation. And I wouldn't be surprised if it all turned out rather a mare's nest. You see, a man can faint and look quite dreadful : a man can have a fit. . . ."

" No," said Marilyn, very quietly. " No, Mr. Malcolm."

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm, suddenly changing his line of conversation. " You say he was dead and you are certain of it. Very well then. But the manager has come to me and he has asked me—knowing, perhaps, a little of my past—to look into the matter for him. I am now, from having had a holiday, professionally interested. My holiday is over."

A frown of annoyance came upon his face.

" Say it ! " said Venn.

" Say it ! " said Marilyn.

" Damn it ! " said Mr. Malcolm.

For the first time since he had entered that room, for the first time, perhaps, since Marilyn had suffered that dreadful experience, she smiled. Mr. Malcolm was pleased to notice it : Mr. Malcolm was delighted with the change that it made in her whole expression : Mr. Malcolm even imagined that he saw a little colour creeping back into those cheeks which should never be without it.

" I think," said Mr. Malcolm, " if you don't mind—and it will be the last time you'll be asked, I promise you, Marilyn—that you'd better tell me in your own words exactly what happened. You see, at the moment I've only got it second-hand—and second-hand stories are so apt to have a third-rate accuracy."

Marilyn responded at once and Mr. Malcolm was pleased to notice that although she had certainly suffered a shock, yet she was now in complete control of her nerves. That moment of panic to which she had succumbed, perhaps unfortunately from the point of view of the investigation, when she had seen the dreadful burden in the lift, had now entirely passed; with every minute that she talked she spoke more slowly, more clearly and her voice became more steady. Mr. Malcolm was delighted: the girl was showing up in just that light which he would have expected. But the story which she told him differed in no detail from that which had been retailed to him by the manager. She had come in: had gone straight to the lift: had a moment of annoyance when she thought it was occupied: had a moment of relief when she realized that she was to be saved the journey upstairs: had her moment of horror, unspeakable horror, when she had seen what lay upon the floor of that lift: and then had come her panic when, slamming the door to shut out the evil sight, she had rushed for help.

Mr. Malcolm sighed. He had hoped that

there might be some loophole, but he was convinced that the girl had told him the truth, and that this was no story of a distorted imagination. Indeed, Mr. Malcolm had felt very little hope that this latter possibility might prove to be the truth : Marilyn was in no way the sort of girl who might suffer from an hysterical imagination. All the same, in view of what he knew of the manager's actions immediately after the staggering news had been brought to him, Mr. Malcolm could have wished, perhaps, that the girl's story had been less convincing.

For a few moments after she had finished it Mr. Malcolm remained deep in thought and said no word. It was Venn who interrupted him.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " I want to help all that I can, but are you officially in charge now ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" I will take all responsibility," he said, " that no word of this story shall reach any other newspaper's ears until you have had at least an issue's start. Will that do ? "

" It will do for me," said Venn, " but I still want to know if you are officially in charge ? "

" Well," said Mr. Malcolm, " of course if this matter is proved to be a murder, then I can only report all that I know at once to the police. Scotland Yard will probably take charge and I can offer my services to the management of this hotel in order to look after their interests. In point of fact Scotland Yard may well require my services, knowing that I am on the spot. Beyond that I can't say that I am officially in charge."

" Good enough for me," said Venn.

" Thank you," said Mr. Malcolm. " So it's understood, Venn, that you send no word of this excitement until I give you permission."

" That's a bargain."

" Good ! Now listen, Marilyn. Immediately after you told your story to the manager of this hotel—who seems to me a fairly bright young man, if a little harassed at the moment—he discovered that there was no one in the lift and that there was no sign of what you had told me you had seen."

" Yes, I know," said Marilyn.

" And do you also know," asked Mr. Malcolm, " that after that he went through every single room in the place and that every single room was empty : also that there was no sign of disturbance in any of them ? "

" No," said Marilyn. " I didn't know that."

She sat upright as she gave her answer : it was obvious that she was more than interested.

" What were you doing all that time ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" I was sitting in the office . . . I stopped there not daring to move . . . not quite understanding what had happened."

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm. " And when the manager came down to you—presuming that he did ? "

" Yes. He came to me and told me that for the moment nothing more could be done. He rather gave me to understand that he didn't believe my story."

" I know," said Mr. Malcolm. " You can't blame him, but he may have considerably more reason to believe your story in the near future."

" Why ? " asked Marilyn. Her voice was eager : evidently she had resented that disparaging incredulity more than she cared to acknowledge.

" Every man, woman and child in this hotel has got to be checked," said Mr. Malcolm. " It's quite obvious that if every single man, woman and child can be accounted for then the value of your story will . . ."

He hesitated.

Marilyn laughed.

" All right," she said. " Go on ! "

" On the other hand," said Mr. Malcolm, " if one person is missing, then your story becomes almost staggering. In the first instance, you see, supposing it was some casual visitor to the hotel, the news will quickly become known that somebody is missing and the fact reported to the police, wherever it may be. The hotel's responsibility is over until that disappearance is notified. In the second instance, however, it is up to me—as an unofficial investigator of crime, but with a duty, nevertheless, to the general public—to make quite sure that a murder has not been committed. To report the facts to the police would be to waste their time if no one is missing. . . ."

" And to prove me a liar ! " broke in Marilyn.

" Not in the least, my dear. Supposing somebody suffered from fits, supposing they were anxious that that fact should not be generally known ? After all, people who suffer from fits very often are ashamed of it . . . then they may never come forward and solve the mystery. No one is saying you didn't see what you did see, the only doubt is whether—even though you are so persistent about it—the body which you saw was lifeless."

There was a long pause : everyone was deep in thought. Then suddenly Venn broke the silence.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " if I can help in any way I do wish you'd let me. It will make it so much a better story, even if nothing comes of it."

" Of course," said Mr. Malcolm, " so much a better story, so much a greater scoop for your paper, so much more credit for yourself—and you shall get all the credit, my friend, if you make a good story out of what will come. But in the meantime let us remember that nothing untoward has happened, let us remember—since we are going to keep the thing to ourselves—that we must behave normally. That will not be easy "—he was looking at the girl as he spoke—" not at all easy."

Marilyn rose to her feet.

" It's nearly six o'clock," she said ; " six o'clock is an unofficial sun-down summer or winter, isn't it ? Will you give me a cocktail, Mr. Malcolm ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled. Mr. Malcolm admired the grit of this girl more than he could say. Mr. Malcolm moved to the door.

" Let's go downstairs," he said.

They walked along the passage and Mr. Malcolm firmly ignored the door of the lift which he was about to pass. He had no desire that the girl should suffer any more than she need, and the stairs were but a few paces further on. Mr. Malcolm made way and Marilyn walked down them, but as she passed him she sent him a little glance of gratitude. Mr. Malcolm smiled. Venn and the girl moved down the stairs ahead of him, for there was not room for three abreast. The staircase was a steep one, twisting suddenly round in a somewhat precarious spiral, which made it a little difficult to descend. Mr. Malcolm had just turned the corner when a cry from immediately above him, a stifled cry, made him stop abruptly.

A figure came hurtling down those stairs, arms, legs, everywhere. It came to rest against the wall. For a few moments it remained motionless in an unnatural position, with one leg bent beneath the weight of the body.

" Good God ! " said a voice. " Who the hell did that ! "

It was scarcely audible, for the man—Mr.

Malcolm could see that it was a man—was evidently in great pain, but Mr. Malcolm heard those words. In a flash he had turned, in a flash he was kneeling beside the figure of the stranger. Mr. Malcolm's voice was tense when he spoke :

" Did what ? " he asked.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Malcolm keeps a Drink waiting

THE man made no attempt to answer, and slipping his arms around his shoulders, Mr. Malcolm supported him from the wall.

" Who did what ? " he repeated.

The man turned and looked at Mr. Malcolm.

Mr. Malcolm realized that he had very nearly lost consciousness from the pain which it was obvious he was suffering, but that he was now regaining control of his faculties.

" Who did what ? " the man repeated.

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm gently. " You just said . . . just after you fell . . . that somebody did something. Can't you remember ? "

Mr. Malcolm's voice was low and very gentle, and he expected to hear either a torrent of abuse from the man whom he was supporting, directed against the person who had caused his fall—if that were the case—or else an impatient admonition to mind his own business. But instead Mr. Malcolm noticed, to his great astonishment, that into the man's eyes had come an unmistakable look of fear. For a few seconds they both stared at each other, and in those seconds Mr. Malcolm suddenly decided that there was something more in this beyond the mere fact that the man had fallen, something which the stranger had every intention to conceal. Even as Mr. Malcolm realized this intention he resolved within himself that come what might he would get at the truth, for in some odd way he felt convinced that that which lay behind was of the greatest interest. Mr. Malcolm based this surmise not so much on the words the man had spoken or on the supposition they inferred, but on that momentary look of fear which he had seen in the eyes of the stranger. However, the man was speaking and Mr. Malcolm had no further time for conjecture.

" I don't know what I said," he remarked. " Good God, my ankle does hurt. Must have fallen on it. I hope not, though . . . felt suddenly giddy, perhaps . . . I do sometimes."

Mr. Malcolm looked at the man's face. He was immensely intrigued by those last few words. Could it be possible that here lay a perfectly innocent explanation of the happenings of that afternoon ? And yet he doubted it, for it could not have taken the manager very long to examine all the bedrooms : it was scarcely likely that had this man suffered from giddiness and had some form of fainting fit in the lift, he could have recovered himself so quickly that he could leave the hotel immediately after the attack. But Mr. Malcolm said no word as he helped the other to his feet. This was no easy matter and might not have been achieved had Noel Venn not arrived to lend him aid. But Marilyn and he had turned and together they had mounted the few steps to the fallen figure. Venn added his useful strength to that of Mr. Malcolm, but it was soon apparent that the stranger was unable to place his left foot to the ground.

" You'd better go back to your room," said Mr. Malcolm, " and lie down for a bit. We will help you. What about a doctor ? "

" Thanks," said the stranger, " thanks. I think, perhaps, it would be a good thing. It feels as if . . ."

" Not broken, I hope ? " put in Mr. Malcolm quickly.

He turned to the girl.

" Marilyn, just run downstairs and tell them at the office to send for a doctor, will you, for Mr. . . ."

He paused and looked interrogatively at the man beside him.

" Dickson is my name," said Fletcher. " Number thirty-seven."

" . . . for Mr. Dickson—number thirty-seven," repeated Mr. Malcolm.

" All right."

Marilyn turned on her heel and ran quickly down the remaining stairs.

Fletcher allowed himself to be half carried by Venn and Mr. Malcolm up to the landing above. His thoughts were racing. Of one thing he was absolutely positive—the fall which he had just suffered had been through no fault of his. Someone had intended that he should fall, someone from behind had pushed him just as he reached the step. His conviction that this had been no mere accident became more assured when he noticed a thing which had escaped him before—the top of the staircase was ill-lit and it would be perfectly possible for a man to conceal himself in the shadows of the wall and unless definitely expected escape detection.

Fletcher cast a quick glance around. He was entirely unable to move by himself, and with an arm around the shoulder of each he was supported along by his companions. He felt sick with the pain of his ankle, but his brain had never been more alert. Someone was getting at him : of that he was certain. Someone who wished him harm, someone, perhaps, who had discovered the misdirection of that killing shot and had determined that the second attempt should prove more accurate. But with these thoughts James Fletcher felt no panic : almost he was relieved, after that first momentary twinge of fear. For now he knew, beyond any possibility of vague imagining, that his conviction had been well-founded ; and with the knowledge his cunning brain was already weaving a net of self-protection.

Very carefully and gently Mr. Malcolm and Noel Venn helped him to the door of his room while these thoughts were racing through his mind. Mr. Malcolm had murmured a few words to which Fletcher had answered automatically, but apparently his replies were satisfactory, although he himself had no notion as to what he had said. But possibly Mr. Malcolm had assumed that the pain from which it was obvious he was suffering, was the cause of such random replies. Together Venn and Mr. Malcolm helped Fletcher to his bed and placed him upon it. The latter looked up at Mr. Malcolm and smiled his thanks.

" It's very kind of you," he said, " very kind indeed. I wonder if perhaps one of you wouldn't mind giving me a glass of water, and " —he seemed to be speaking with difficulty— " and I wonder if perhaps one of you wouldn't mind waiting with me a little while until the doctor comes ? I felt a little faint when I was . . . when I fell, and I'd rather not be alone just for the moment."

Very keenly, through half-closed eyes, Fletcher watched the effect of his words. His request appeared to him perfectly natural, but the reason for his desire for company was far different from that which he had given. Fletcher did not trust the shadows of the passage beyond his door. Fletcher was beginning to be entirely convinced that someone was waiting to visit him, and he realized that his best chance of avoiding such a visit until he was prepared for it, was to have company.

Noel Venn immediately volunteered the service.

" Of course," said the young man, already moving over to the water-jug on the washstand. " I'll stay with you. Mr. Malcolm, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling Marilyn that I'll be down as soon as the doctor arrives."

" Thanks so much," said Fletcher, from the bed. " You're very kind, I'm sure."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" Of course not. Anything that we can do we are only too pleased to do. I should hate to fall down and sprain my ankle and find everyone's hand against me."

And he laughed. But the words sounded somehow ominous to the man on the bed. He looked at Mr. Malcolm interrogatively, wondering whether anything lay behind their surface meaning : but evidently not, for Mr. Malcolm was smiling now, was, in fact, already moving towards the door.

" I'll see that the doctor isn't long," he said. " If he doesn't come soon I should advise you to put that foot of yours in water. It's very good for sprains. Pour the jug as cold as you can bear it over your ankle and keep on doing it. Basin to jug—jug to basin : you know." He made a suggestive gesture with his hands. " If it's a sprain, that will do it the world of good. If it's a break, of course that's a different thing—but I hope it's not."

" Thank you so much," murmured Fletcher again, somewhat relieved that Mr. Malcolm had so evidently intended nothing by those ambiguous words. " Thank you very much indeed."

Mr. Malcolm walked quickly downstairs and found Marilyn in the lounge.

" Sent for a doctor, my dear ? " he asked.

" There's one just going up," said the girl with a smile. " The manager happened to find him very quickly. I think he was in the hotel somewhere. Very lucky. But talking of luck —what a foul business ! "

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " a fall downstairs can be a horrible thing, you know. I'm afraid he's sprained his ankle very badly."

" Who is he ? " asked the girl.

" I've no idea," said Mr. Malcolm. " I don't remember seeing him about the place before."

" I think I have," said Marilyn thoughtfully. " I think he's been here a day or so. I've an idea that I saw him going in to lunch yesterday."

" Well," said Mr. Malcolm cheerfully, " let's change the conversation. We've had enough. . . ."

Marilyn placed her hand gently on his arm.

" Mr. Malcolm," she said, " I thought we weren't going to refer . . ."

She also paused.

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" What did you say upstairs, Marilyn ? A cocktail ? "

The girl smiled.

" Yes."

" What a vicious habit for a young lady," remarked Mr. Malcolm. " But how entirely do I agree with you."

He rang a bell and very soon a waitress was at his side.

" What sort of a cocktail, Marilyn ? "

" Oh, anything."

She smiled.

" A dry Martini ? "

" That will do splendidly."

" Three dry Martinis," said Mr. Malcolm. " If we've any luck Venn won't be down in time to drink his and we can share it."

But even as he said the words Noel Venn came down the stairs.

" You're a splendid messenger," he laughed, as he approached Marilyn. " You got that doctor in record time."

" Yes—it was lucky. Did you wait and hear what happened ? "

" Only a sprain, I think, but a pretty bad one. Anyway, he seems quite happy now."

The waitress approached with the drinks and Venn looked up.

" Ah ! " he said, " thank you, Mr. Malcolm. How very thoughtful."

But Mr. Malcolm rose from his seat and taking a glass in his hand bowed smilingly to Marilyn.

" My dear," he said, " you will excuse me, I know, but . . . er . . . I think I have some work to do. I can leave you now in good hands with our young friend here. Remember. . . ! "

" Yes," said Marilyn with a smile. " I'll remember."

" Very good," said Mr. Malcolm. " Forget, then."

He laughed cheerfully and walked towards the office of the hotel, and as he did so he whistled to himself gaily. Things were improving. Marilyn was obviously better, once more in complete control of herself, and again capable of being safely left in the charge of Noel Venn for the moment, and Mr. Malcolm felt that he was approaching a series of events which would amuse him.

For never was Mr. Malcolm quite so happy as when he was at work.

CHAPTER IX

The Manager resents Mr. Malcolm

MR. MALCOLM entered the manager's office after a discreet knock, and found that individual seated behind his desk looking considerably less worried than when previously Mr. Malcolm had conversed with him in that room. Mr. Malcolm smiled. Without waiting for an invitation on this occasion, Mr. Malcolm moved straight over to the armchair and sat down.

" Well ? " he asked.

" Good news, Mr. Malcolm," said the manager, quite cheerfully. " I've investigated the whereabouts of every guest in this hotel and every member of the staff. All are accounted for. I'm afraid that Miss Gaynor must have—— "

He paused. He knew that Marilyn Gaynor sat at the same table in the dining-room as Mr. Malcolm. Presumably they were friends. He had no wish to say anything derogatory about the girl, whose beauty he admired, but he could not conceal from himself the fact that he felt a certain irritation at the trouble to which she had put him—apparently quite unnecessarily.

Mr. Malcolm finished the sentence for him.

" . . . must have suffered from some curious hallucination ? "

" That's it," said the manager, gratefully. " That's it."

" Well," said Mr. Malcolm, " I do hope you are right."

" But there can be no doubt about it," said the manager quickly. " Listen, Mr. Malcolm. Nearly everyone has been back to the hotel since the big match."

He frowned slightly as he said these words : it had suddenly occurred to him that not only had Miss Gaynor put him to a considerable amount of trouble, but she had also deprived him of the pleasure of watching one of the greatest matches in the history of golf.

" Those who haven't been back," he went on, " I have found to be unharmed "—he laughed —" at the clubhouse. The staff is complete. The only one visitor—and that a new arrival this morning—who hasn't personally been seen, has been accounted for, as I've received a telegram from him from Edinburgh telling me of a change of plans."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm quietly. " I see."

There was a short pause during which the manager looked at Mr. Malcolm and Mr. Malcolm looked at the manager. The manager was striving all that he could to discover what was going on in the mind behind those expressionless eyes. The manager had an uncomfortable feeling that Mr. Malcolm did not accept the easy way out which his investigations had offered to him. He was perfectly satisfied that all that he had to do now was to sit back and congratulate himself that no disturbance had happened in his hotel and that no unwelcome publicity would ensue. Publicity is always pleasant for an institution such as an hotel, but the manager well knew that a tragedy occurring in it is not the sort of publicity to attract the traveller. He was satisfied that he had done all that he could, and was delighted by the fact that all seemed clear now for a pleasant pursuance of the normal hotel life.

But Mr. Malcolm made him feel uneasy. Mr. Malcolm sat there quietly in his chair, saying neither that he agreed with the manager's belief nor that he disagreed. Mr. Malcolm seemed—although he certainly did not put anything like it into words—rather disappointed at this sudden bursting of the bubble. To the manager Mr. Malcolm looked rather like a hound suffering from the discovery that the fox he was chasing was not even so tangible as a field-mouse. And Mr. Malcolm's next words, although in themselves perfectly innocent, startled the manager to an extent which he would have been very loth to admit.

" That telegram," said Mr. Malcolm. " May I see it ? "

" Certainly," said the manager. " Certainly."

He took a pink form from among the papers in front of him and handed this over.

" Thank you," said Mr. Malcolm.

For a moment or two he perused the writing and then he looked up.

" This is signed ' Dickson,' " he said.

" Yes," said the manager. " Yes—that's the man's name."

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm. " It also happens to be the name of another of your guests in this hotel."

" Quite true," said the manager. " We have two Dicksons."

Mr. Malcolm, watching the manager closely, suddenly realized that the man was uneasy. Mr. Malcolm determined to probe to the source of this uneasiness.

" One of them," he said, " has just sprained his ankle—rather badly, I fear. He fell down the stairs and I helped him back to his room."

" Oh, it was you who helped him ? " said the manager quickly. " I see. Miss Gaynor came down and said a doctor was required and luckily there was one in the lounge. I sent him up. We ought to have his report quite soon."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " funnily enough we were talking about him, Miss Gaynor and I . . . about the gentleman who had the accident, and I couldn't remember having seen him before. Miss Gaynor said she thought she had seen him at lunch yesterday. When did he arrive ? "

" Late the day before yesterday," replied the manager. " He had booked some time before . . . at least——"

He paused.

" At least what ? " asked Mr. Malcolm, blandly.

" Well, there was a curious mistake. You see, a Mr. Dickson had booked a room by wire from Marseilles. He was coming back from the East. He was interested in golf, I think, and wanted to watch the Championship. When a man called Dickson arrived the day before yesterday—rather before I had expected him, in fact—and asked if there was a room, he was told that we were absolutely full up. He then said : ' Really ? My name is Dickson ' or something of that sort, and we realized where the mistake had come in. He was immediately shown to number thirty-seven."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm. " But that is scarcely a curious mistake, merely stupid on his part. He should have mentioned his name first."

" Yes—but that's not quite all," said the manager thoughtfully, " because this morning a man named Dickson arrived and asked for the room booked in his name."

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm.

The manager looked up quickly : the manager did not like the sound of that monosyllable : the manager felt that the hound had somehow decided that the field-mouse was larger than he had at first believed.

" We then realized," said the manager, " that we had made a mistake in giving the room to the other Dickson, the Dickson who had arrived first. However, as I had one or two rooms vacant, owing to the unfortunate and premature disappearance of one or two of my guests from the Championship, I was able to give him another room and cover up my mistake."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm, " and . . . er . . . this Dickson who arrived this morning, and who is the rightful owner of number thirty-seven, disappeared and sent you this telegram ? "

" That's right," said the manager ; here, at least, he was on safe ground. " That's right. I sent the trunk off to-day."

" By what train ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" By the four-twenty-five."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm. " Yes, quite right."

He looked down at the paper in his hand : he read the words upon it.

" *Please send my large trunk to Waverley Station Edinburgh to be called for Sudden change of plan Retain rest of my luggage until further communication* Dickson."

" Have you had a look at the rest of the luggage ? " asked Mr. Malcolm suddenly.

The manager looked surprised.

" What do you mean, sir ? "

" Well, that's your only guarantee for the price of the room."

" Oh, no, it isn't," said the manager quickly, with rather a superior smile. " You see, Mr. Dickson paid for his room for a week in advance."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm. " I see. Yes—that does make a difference, doesn't it ? "

He paused.

" But isn't it a little odd," he said, " that the other Dickson, the Dickson who has had this most regrettable accident, should . . . er . . . should rather have implied—for I take it that he did rather imply—the fact that he was the Dickson who had telegraphed from Marseilles ? "

" Well, Mr. Malcolm," said the manager slowly. " You see, the girl was in the office at the time and I don't know exactly what did pass between them. Anyway, she gave him the room booked for Dickson—and that, I think, is a very natural mistake."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm. " Yes, I see."

He rose to his feet somewhat abruptly. The manager had an uncomfortable impression that the hound had turned on a fresh scent, a good scent this time. Mr. Malcolm handed back the pink slip to the man seated at the desk. Mr. Malcolm turned and walked towards the door. There he paused for a moment.

" I think," he said, " I'll just go along and see how our friend Dickson is getting along with his ankle. What more natural "—he spoke very slowly and deliberately, "—what more natural than that I should go up and find out how he is, considering that I was present at the time of the accident and helped him to his room ? ”

The manager said no word. The door closed behind Mr. Malcolm. The manager took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

What on earth was this strange individual getting at ?

The manager felt slightly resentful towards Mr. Malcolm. After all, the unfortunate affair had seemed to clear itself up so very naturally and so very pleasantly. Mr. Malcolm seemed unwilling to accept the obviously simple explanation, and to be pursuing a line of investigation all on his own.

The manager found himself regretting that he had ever called upon Mr. Malcolm for his aid.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Malcolm replaces a Clean Handkerchief

MR. MALCOLM moved across the lounge quickly. In the manager's office he had made up his mind how he proposed to act, even as he had been carrying on with the conversation and reading that telegram. If he had left an apparently satisfied manager in that office Mr. Malcolm himself was by no means so satisfied.

As he approached the foot of the stairs he cast a quick glance in the direction of the table at which he had left Marilyn and young Venn, and he noticed, with an inward smile, that the girl and boy were deep in light-hearted chatter. Young Venn was just the tonic that Marilyn required at that moment in order to make her forget the gruesome spectacle which Mr. Malcolm had now no doubt at all she had witnessed that afternoon.

As he walked up the first few steps he thought to himself how very stupid and self-satisfied must be the manager of the hotel, to be so ready to dismiss the story which had been told him by Marilyn when suffering, quite obviously, from the stress of shock. It was so evident that this girl was not of the type to invent anything so monstrous. What was more, Mr. Malcolm knew that she was of a downright and honest nature and would have been incapable of fabricating a tale merely because she was in search of sensation. For had the entire story been but imaginary there could have been no other possible explanation but that she was merely in search of sensation. Mr. Malcolm was quite prepared to admit that certain young ladies, even certain young ladies of his acquaintance, might conceivably create just such a scene for this very purpose, but of Marilyn Gaynor he had no such doubts at all. If she said she had seen a certain thing it was quite enough for Mr. Malcolm.

He approached the top of the stairs and as he did so he noticed a man, dressed in a dark grey flannel suit, close the door of number thirty-seven and turn towards him. This, thought Mr. Malcolm, must be the doctor, and he stopped him at the head of the stairs.

" You are the doctor, I presume ? " he said pleasantly.

The other man, middle-aged, tall, acknowledged his identity.

" I am so sorry to trouble you," said Mr. Malcolm, " but it so happens that I was in front of the gentleman when . . . er . . . when he had the accident. I was just coming up now to see if I could do anything. Is he seriously hurt ? "

" Quite a bad sprain," replied the other, and

Mr. Malcolm noticed that he spoke with a very definitely educated accent. Mr. Malcolm was a little astonished. He would have expected some slight tinge of Scottish surroundings and, perhaps, parentage, to have been perceptible in the speech of a local doctor, but a moment's reflection dispelled this surprise, for he realized that it was more than likely that this man had settled at St. Andrews possibly for the sake of his health, or for golf, and pursued his practice rather as an occupation than merely for financial gain.

" He doesn't seem to be able to tell me what happened."

" No ? " said Mr. Malcolm. " He seemed a little obscure to me, but then I thought it was the shock of a sudden accident. Most disturbing to fall down a flight of stairs like those. . . ." Mr. Malcolm pointed towards them, with a smile.

" Most disturbing," replied the doctor, " but very easy to do it, down stairs as steep as those. Once you catch your foot in anything there's nothing to stop you."

" No," said Mr. Malcolm, but his tone was dubious. " No . . . only I don't see what he could have caught his foot on . . . I had just come down them myself a second or so before . . . on my way to get a cocktail."

The doctor laughed, significantly.

" Ah ! perhaps that's the explanation," he said. " *You* had yet to get your cocktail . . ."

Mr. Malcolm understood.

The doctor paused: then suddenly broke the silence.

"I think it's very likely he had consumed several," he murmured.

"Then really," said Mr. Malcolm, "I suppose he's rather lucky not to have broken anything."

"Yes . . . yes, definitely lucky. Well, I must be getting on. I've told him I will come back to-night and make him comfortable."

"I see," said Mr. Malcolm, with a smile. "Right! Thank you very much, doctor."

He paused a moment and watched the doctor's lean form descend the stairs, then approaching the door of number thirty-seven he knocked upon it gently. He heard someone call to him to enter and he advanced quickly into the room, closing the door behind him.

The man whom he had helped was now lying in his bed: evidently the doctor had assisted him to undress and had settled him comfortably.

"Ah!" said Mr. Malcolm, "I see that you're quite snug in here. I came up merely to ask if I could do anything."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure." The man in the bed smiled. "Very kind of you, indeed, sir. I'm afraid I don't know your name."

"My name is Malcolm."

"I want to thank you, Mr. Malcolm, then, for your kindness—and also the young man who stayed with me until the doctor arrived."

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Mr.

Malcolm quickly, moving over to the fireplace and standing with his back to it. " You've thanked us quite enough already. After all, we did nothing. I met the doctor as I was coming up. He tells me it's a sprain—that you've escaped a fracture."

" Yes—rather lucky, I'm told."

" Very lucky, from the way you came down those stairs after me ! " Mr. Malcolm smiled. " I didn't really know what had happened."

" Neither did I."

" You said something," said Mr. Malcolm, " about . . . er . . . about sometimes suffering from fits of giddiness. Do you think you lost your balance or something ? "

" Really, I haven't the slightest idea." The man in the bed, his face rather pale, but otherwise showing no signs of his recent accident, looked puzzled. " I shall be very careful of stairs in future, I can assure you."

" Of course," said Mr. Malcolm. " Once bitten—twice shy, but I must say that, annoying though it may be, you haven't suffered very much considering it was such a nasty fall."

He paused for a moment and looked around him. There was nothing about the room to indicate the character of the man who occupied it, excepting that it was very orderly, and Mr. Malcolm realized that he must indeed be of a tidy nature.

He started the conversation again. Mr. Malcolm, so far, had obtained nothing from his visit, and he was anxious to glean all that he could.

"You were out on the course to-day, I suppose ?"

"Er . . . yes . . . yes I was."

"Ah !" said Mr. Malcolm. "Then you were very lucky, in a sense, that this accident didn't occur earlier, for you saw the great match this afternoon."

"Yes," replied the other, without the slightest hesitation. "Yes, I did. A great match, wasn't it ?"

"It certainly was," said Mr. Malcolm. "I don't remember ever having enjoyed a match so much before, or ever being so excited. I found myself almost praying for the success of Cyril Tolley. Not," he added quickly, "that I had anything against Bobby Jones. Certainly not. But . . . well, one would have liked one's own countryman to win !"

"Naturally."

"They did play wonderful golf," said Mr. Malcolm, enthusing on his subject. "I do wish I could play just one stroke a round such as any I saw played this afternoon. D'you know, I have often thought that one really good shot is satisfying. Are you a golfer ?"

"Oh, most indifferent."

"So am I," said Mr. Malcolm. "Almost beyond the limit of a handicap committee ! But I get a great deal of fun out of it and one good shot just makes my day."

The other laughed.

" The later in the round the better then, perhaps," he said.

" I've never thought of that," said Mr. Malcolm. " Yes, perhaps you're right."

" As late as the seventeenth ! "

" Ah," said Mr. Malcolm, " now you're referring to the great hole of the match, of course. It turned the entire thing, didn't it ? "

" Yes—undoubtedly."

" I really thought," continued Mr. Malcolm, " that after Cyril Tolley had played his second shot, the match was over."

" Jones played a beauty after him," remarked the other.

Mr. Malcolm looked at him.

" Yes—rather a peculiar shot, shall we say ? "

" Well—a very lovely shot."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " yes."

He paused : he looked at the man in the bed : he decided to continue on this subject.

" I wasn't certain," said Mr. Malcolm, " whether it really was Tolley's turn to play first."

" Oh, I suppose it must have been," said the other. " There didn't seem to be any doubt about it."

" No," said Mr. Malcolm. " No—I suppose there wasn't, but it made it . . . er . . . a more difficult shot for him ; of course, I never expected Jones to reach the green."

" He played the shot better than Tolley," remarked the other.

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm gently, " but . . . er . . . rather an astonishing shot, wasn't it—if he meant it."

" Oh," replied the other, " but he's a great golfer and he went for the great shot."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " yes."

But Mr. Malcolm suddenly decided to turn to another part of the game.

" At the nineteenth hole," he said, " I thought Tolley might get him."

" Yes, you're quite right—so did I."

" I thought his second," said Mr. Malcolm, " really taking it all in all, was badly treated. I thought it was a better shot than Jones' second."

" So did I," said the other, without the slightest hesitation, " it was just the stimey that did it."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, brightly, " yes—just the stimey."

There was a short pause, and throughout the time that it lasted Mr. Malcolm was staring at his shoes. What he found about them of such surpassing interest it would have been quite impossible for him to say, because his eyes were not examining them, were not inspecting any feature of the polished leather at which his gaze was directed. In point of fact Mr. Malcolm's thoughts were very far away. He was wondering why it was that this man should have fallen so easily into the trap that had been laid for him. His remarks upon the play at the seventeenth hole had first caused Mr. Malcolm to realize that his knowledge of golf must be peculiarly inaccurate ; Mr. Malcolm had thus had reason for discussing that last hole in detail, describing the shots in so misleading a manner as to make it absolutely impossible for anyone sufficiently interested in golf to walk round the course, to have agreed with any of his comments. And the man in the bed had agreed with every word he uttered.

Suddenly Mr. Malcolm checked these thoughts, for he realized that this lengthy pause might appear suspicious to the other, if indeed this man had something to conceal ; and as he ceased to concentrate on that conversation which had just taken place, his eyes began to focus on the object at which they were directed and to convey to his brain what that object was. Mr. Malcolm discovered that he was looking at a small green article which glistened between his feet on the mat upon which he was standing. Mr. Malcolm looked at it : vaguely it reminded him of something.

The man in the bed spoke :

" It really is very kind of you," he said, " to have come up to relieve the monotony of this evening. But I'm not really quite so lucky with this accident as would appear on the surface. Certainly I was able to watch the match, but I've an important engagement for this evening, and the doctor informs me that there is some doubt as to whether I shall manage to keep it."

" An engagement for this evening ? " said Mr. Malcolm. " Oh, I see—a dinner engagement."

" No," said the other. " I was to have met a gentleman after dinner and to have discussed some business. That's really why I am here, although I'm thoroughly interested in golf and have played a good deal. I thought I'd be able to settle this business and see the Championship at the same time."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm.

But he scarcely knew what he had said, for his thoughts were not on the subject. What was it this man had said ? That he took a great interest in golf : that he played it a good deal.

" As I walked back from the nineteenth hole," said Mr. Malcolm, determined to be quite sure of his ground, " I wondered to myself when I had ever seen a better match."

" And I," said the other, " as I walked back, Mr. Malcolm, I too wondered if I should ever see a better."

" Who knows ? " said Mr. Malcolm. " Who knows ? I doubt it." And as he pronounced the words he took from his pocket a cigarette-case. " Care for a smoke ? "

" Thanks very much."

Mr. Malcolm moved over to the bed, handed his cigarette-case to the invalid and lit the cigarette which he took from it. He then returned to the rug and resumed his previous stance. Taking a cigarette from his case he placed this between his lips, replaced the case, and lit a match. He lit his cigarette and turned to throw the dead match into the fire, but as he did so, in some unaccountable way, the cigarette slipped from between his lips and fell to the floor.

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm, " how clumsy of me."

As he spoke he bent down quickly and lifted the cigarette from the mat before it could burn a hole. Replacing this between his lips once more he inhaled lengthily, while he thrust the matchbox into his pocket. Perhaps his hand remained there for rather a longer time than was strictly necessary merely to replace his matchbox, but if this were so it passed unnoticed by the other. Actually, Mr. Malcolm's fingers were occupied in placing that small green object which he had picked up from the mat, inside the matchbox in his pocket.

" Well, Dickson," said Mr. Malcolm, " I'll be along again this evening to see if I can be of any help."

He moved towards the door.

" It's very kind of you, Mr. Malcolm." The man in the bed spoke pleasantly. " It really is very kind of you to be so thoughtful, but please don't worry. You see, the doctor is coming again after dinner and he is going to try to patch up my ankle sufficiently to enable me to keep my appointment. After that . . . well, it won't do me any harm to have a day or so in bed.

And then I hope I shall be well enough to return south, in accordance with my plans."

"I see," said Mr. Malcolm. "Well, if I can do anything you have only to let me know."

"That's really very charming of you."

"Not a bit. So long!"

Mr. Malcolm moved to the door, opened it and shut it behind him. He paused for a moment and then turned towards his own bedroom, which lay further along the passage. Upon reaching it he entered quickly and flung himself down upon the window-seat. Taking the matchbox from his pocket he opened it and carefully withdrew the small green circle which he had removed from the mat in the other's room. At first Mr. Malcolm felt a slight tinge of disappointment, for it proved to be nothing but a green sequin which had evidently fallen from some lady's evening dress. But as he looked at it Mr. Malcolm became more and more convinced that he had seen just such an article before, and very recently.

Mr. Malcolm sat back in his chair and closed his eyes, the little green sequin held firmly between his forefinger and thumb : Mr. Malcolm racked his brains : Mr. Malcolm seldom did so unsuccessfully. Mr. Malcolm opened his eyes again and in them there was now a gleam of satisfaction. For Mr. Malcolm remembered a green evening dress adorned with just such sequins, that had been worn at dinner the night before by a middle-aged lady, the wife of a competitor in the Championship.

" Now what," said Mr. Malcolm, " has an unattractive, middle-aged lady been doing in the room of Mr. Dickson ? "

For a space of time which must have lasted nearly half an hour he remained seated, deep in thought. Then he rose to his feet and rang the bell. Very shortly afterwards it was answered by the chambermaid.

" Do you think it possible," said Mr. Malcolm, with a pleasant smile, " that I could have a bath ? "

" Certainly, sir. I'll run it now."

" Thank you so much," said Mr. Malcolm.

Half an hour later Mr. Malcolm, changed for dinner, walked along the passage towards the lift ; as he neared it he saw Marilyn already waiting there. Mr. Malcolm smiled. It pleased him to see this girl, evidently having summoned up the necessary courage, waiting for the lift in which she had seen that sight which had caused all the uneasiness : it pleased him to see that she had overcome her nerves, and had evidently determined that her connection with the affair was now over and that she must not give way to weakness. She was certainly putting herself to a severe test by deliberately using that lift which must naturally be so distasteful to her. Mr. Malcolm hastened towards it.

" Ah, Marilyn," he said, " may I accompany you ? "

She looked at him: she smiled.

"Good girl!" said Mr. Malcolm.

Impulsively Marilyn held out her hand and squeezed that of Mr. Malcolm. Then the lift came opposite the landing and he held open the door for her. She stepped inside. Mr. Malcolm shut the gate, and pressed the button. He was feeling a little awkward. Marilyn's gesture had been so spontaneous, so friendly, that it pleased him greatly. Mr. Malcolm's eyes roved about the floor of the lift: Mr. Malcolm's eyes became riveted upon a certain object in the corner: Mr. Malcolm stiffened. That gleam which had been present when he had been seated, deep in thought, within his own room such a little time before, returned with a doubled intensity.

The lift arrived on the ground floor. Mr. Malcolm opened the door and stood aside for Marilyn to pass, and then he followed her for a pace only. As he did so his hand remained upon the door of the lift, for he was determined that no one should summon it away from him.

"Oh, bother!" said Mr. Malcolm suddenly. "I've forgotten my handkerchief. My dear, go to that corner and get me a cocktail, will you?"

He turned swiftly and stepped back into the lift. He put it into motion, but half-way between the two floors, where it was impossible for anyone to observe his actions, he pressed the emergency button. The lift came to a standstill. Mr. Malcolm bent down and, taking care that his fingers should not touch it, very carefully he lifted an object from the floor with the clean silk handkerchief which he had taken from his pocket, and wrapped it in the handkerchief. Thereupon he continued his ascent to the first floor.

Mr. Malcolm almost ran to his room. He thrust the handkerchief containing his treasure trove in the right-hand drawer of the dressing-table, and quickly taking out another handkerchief, he placed this in his pocket, taking great care that only the edges showed, in accordance with approved fashion. He then returned to the lounge.

The lift had given up its secret. Marilyn—could she but know it—had been completely vindicated.

CHAPTER XI

Wanted on the Telephone

MR. MALCOLM'S first action on returning to the lounge and finding Marilyn and Venn seated at the table which they usually occupied, was to raise to his lips the cocktail glass which was there waiting for him. He felt he needed it. Not only that ; he felt also that he must drink to the health of the unknown deity who seemed to be looking after him so carefully in this investigation.

For Mr. Malcolm was now fully alive to the fact that something extremely close to crime—if not actually crime itself—had been committed in the hotel that afternoon. Mr. Malcolm was like that. Though normally not of a curious nature, yet when the slightest suggestion of something suspicious came to his ears he could not lay down his self-imposed task until he had completely solved the riddle which might lie behind it.

But his second action, which followed almost immediately upon his first, was to attract the attention of the waitress and ask for a telephone directory of Edinburgh. Marilyn and Venn looked at him in surprise.

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm. " You didn't

know I had friends all over the world, did you? There's one I want to talk to in Edinburgh."

" On business? " asked Venn.

" Business," said Mr. Malcolm with finality.

The young man's curiosity was effectively quelled by the tone in which the word was spoken.

When the book was brought to him Mr. Malcolm did not take long to find the number he required, and returning it to the waitress he asked her to obtain it for him and to let him know as soon as he was through.

" You don't mind waiting," he said, turning to Marilyn, " do you, my dear? It's rather important. But it will only take me a few minutes once I'm through."

" Of course not."

Marilyn smiled.

For a few moments the conversation continued, conversation chiefly concerned with the Championship and with the chances of any other Englishman being able to circumvent the American menace, in the shape of Bobby Jones, from reaching the final now that Cyril Tolley had so gloriously failed. Venn, trained to notice little things, accustomed by virtue of his profession to make the most of any signs in the faces of those he watched, could not but admire Mr. Malcolm in that moment. He felt assured that the latter was very busy, that his mind was fully occupied with all sorts of thoughts, at the nature of which he could not even guess; but in spite of this Mr. Malcolm was able to carry on a perfectly normal, even enthusiastic conversation about the game of golf which he had seen that afternoon.

It was not many minutes before the waitress approached Mr. Malcolm and informed him that she had got through to his Edinburgh number. Quickly moving over to the telephone-box he shut himself in.

" Hullo ! " he said.

" Yes."

The answer was somewhat taciturn.

" Is Inspector Varney there ? "

" Yes," came the reply. " Who wants him ? "

" It's Mr. Malcolm speaking."

Mr. Malcolm thought he heard an exclamation of surprise from the other end of the wire, and he smiled to himself. He was not kept waiting long.

" Hullo ? "

" Hullo. Is that you, Varney ? "

" Good gracious, Mr. Malcolm, what on earth are you doing up here ? "

" I don't quite know," said Mr. Malcolm.

" What ? "

" I said I didn't quite know," said Mr. Malcolm. " I'd like you to help me to find out. But I want you to do something in Edinburgh first."

" Where are you speaking from ? "

The voice of the Inspector seemed puzzled.

Again Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" I'm speaking from St. Andrews," he said.

" Did you see the match ? " asked Varney.

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm. " Shut up ! Listen. A trunk has been sent to the Waverley station to be called for in the name of Dickson."

" I see," said Varney. " Well ? "

" Just go along to the station now, will you, Varney, old man. Open that trunk and when you know what is inside ring me up at once."

" All right."

The voice was brisk. Inspector Varney had evidently recognized the fact that Mr. Malcolm was on business.

" What do you expect me to find ? "

" I don't quite know," said Mr. Malcolm. " At least, I do really, but I'd rather not tell you. I don't want your imagination to be influenced in any way."

" Where shall I ring you ? " asked the Inspector.

" The Supreme, St. Andrews."

" Right."

" By the way," said Mr. Malcolm, " if I were you I'd take a car to the Waverley station."

" I intended to do that anyway."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" Of course," he said, " but a police car that can bring you to St. Andrews very quickly."

" Oh," said the Inspector : again his tone was puzzled.

" And if I were you," said Mr. Malcolm, " I should take a doctor with you in that car.

I should like to know exactly the cause of death."

With that he rang off.

Mr. Malcolm returned to his half-finished cocktail and to his friends.

" I didn't keep you waiting long, did I ? " he asked.

Marilyn smiled to him. Once again it forcibly struck Mr. Malcolm how very attractive this girl was ; how her smile seemed to brighten not merely her own face but the very room in which she was seated and the people about her. He wondered whether his own feeling of elation might not be due to something else besides her smile, perhaps to that subdued excitement which was now burning within him. If he were right . . . but why think of these things at the moment ? Mr. Malcolm preferred to have his facts cut-and-dried in front of him before making too many guesses at a venture.

He looked around him at the faces of those who were now occupying every available table in the lounge. This was the cocktail hour—a few minutes before dinner—the hour when the most hardened digestions become loosened and the most delicate encouraged by the gentle aperitif. He noted the healthy looks of one and all and the babble of conversation which was being carried on at every table. The great topic, no doubt, accounted for this, and Mr. Malcolm was pleased at the thought of all this interest on the part of grown men in what was, after all, only a game . . . what was, after all, but the sport of holidays. For a moment he marvelled at the extraordinary power of golf which could thus dispel the thought of business worries from the minds of serious business men, and make them forgetful of everything save that one pursuit which they strove so hard to master, yet which always mastered them.

Mr. Malcolm's eyes wandering around the room came to rest, at last, upon a table not very far from that which he himself was occupying. A lady was seated at it, a lady, middle-aged, unattractive, wearing a dress of clinging silk, the bodice of which shimmered dazzlingly with thousands of tiny green sequins. Mr. Malcolm looked at her companion, the only other person seated at that table. Mr. Malcolm knew who he was: had, indeed, a slight conversational acquaintance with him. He had been defeated in the first round of the Championship, but he was remaining on care-free now, watching the worries of others and thoroughly enjoying himself. Mr. Malcolm turned to Marilyn.

" My dear," he said, " I am very restless to-night. You must excuse me. Just for a moment, however, may I go and say a word to a friend ? "

" But of course."

Mr. Malcolm smiled. He knew very well that his presence at that table was quite unnecessary, that the young and attractive Noel

Venn could quite easily entertain the girl without any assistance from him.

Mr. Malcolm rose to his feet and moved over to the table which had attracted his notice. He moved in such a manner that he might well have been but passing it on his way to the dining-room, but catching the eye of its male occupant he stopped.

" No need to ask what you're talking about ! " he smiled. " No need to make an inaccurate guess as to what anybody is talking about in this room, and personally, I never hope to see a better match."

" Quite," said the man. " Quite ! "

He had risen to his feet.

" I don't think you know my wife ? "

" How do you do," said Mr. Malcolm, with his most charming smile.

Mr. Malcolm made light conversation. Mr. Malcolm was very good at making light conversation, and it was almost unnoticeable that he had now broached the one topic which had brought him to that table, when he suddenly turned to the husband :

" Bad luck about Dickson, isn't it ? " he said.

He had addressed his question to the husband, but his eyes had never left the face of the woman seated before him, looking so gloriously gorgeous in her somewhat vivid dress, the little green sequins scintillating as they caught the light.

" Dickson ? " The word formed a question. " Dickson ? Who is he ? "

It was the man who had spoken and Mr. Malcolm noticed that no change had come across the face of the woman. She had displayed, Mr. Malcolm had to admit, a polite interest, but polite interest and no more.

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm, " I thought you knew him. A fellow who arrived here yesterday. Staying on the first floor."

" No," said the man. " No. I don't know him."

" He fell downstairs just before dinner," said Mr. Malcolm ; " sprained his ankle rather badly. However, I happened to be there—I didn't know him either before—and I helped him to get back to his room. I told him he was lucky."

" Lucky ? " It was the wife who spoke. " Dear me, you have a strange idea of luck, Mr. Malcolm."

" Lucky, dear madam," said Mr. Malcolm smilingly, " in that he had been spared two sound ankles with which to be present at the match. Lucky in that the accident did not occur until he had, at least, had that pleasure."

" Oh ! " The woman laughed. " I see."

" I was merely trying to comfort him," said Mr. Malcolm. " Well, well. I must be getting back to see if my two young people are ready for their dinner. Personally . . . I am. A day on this golf course makes me ravenous."

He smiled and walked back to Marilyn and Venn. He did not sit down at the table: instead he broke into their conversation.

" Marilyn—food ! "

She laughed.

" I honestly believe there are only two things you think of, Mr. Malcolm," she said, as she rose, " one is your golf and the other your tummy."

" I'm glad," said Mr. Malcolm, " that you have mentioned them in the right order ! Come on ! "

But as he followed Marilyn to the dining-room and as they took their seats at the table, Mr. Malcolm's mind was on other things. It is a curious fact, thought Mr. Malcolm, that all lawyers and all policemen, even in the plain-clothes branch, can tell when a man is speaking the truth. And it's a curious thing, thought Mr. Malcolm, that I also have that faculty. And with that little self-applied pat on the back he sat down, completely and utterly convinced that the lady in the vivid green dress, in that dress which was scintillating with sequins, had never met a Mr. Dickson in her life.

Mr. Malcolm enjoyed his dinner, as was his usual wont. The food was excellent and he was ready for it. Mr. Malcolm sipped a glass of port with evident satisfaction, when his meal was over. Mr. Malcolm did not light his cigarette until his glass of port was finished. Mr. Malcolm was about to leave the dining-room when the hall porter came to his side.

" Excuse me, Mr. Malcolm. You are wanted on the telephone."

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm.

He rose and followed the hall porter from the room.

CHAPTER XII

Fletcher tots up the Bill

WHILE Mr. Malcolm was dining downstairs, Fletcher lay on his bed smoking thoughtfully, having just completed a meal equal in quality if not so great in quantity as that which the former was now consuming. For appetite was lacking to James Fletcher, lacking, perhaps, more by reason of his inward excitement than on account of the pain in his foot, which, since the doctor's ministrations, had now become considerably less.

It was very quiet up there upon the first floor of the hotel, deserted now by the hungry folk who thronged the dining-room, and after the noisy hub-bub of passers-by answering the clanging summons of the gong, Fletcher found this silence a little disturbing. He found himself listening, listening for the whisper of furtive feet along the passage outside, for their sudden halt before his door, for a gentle rap, or, worst of all, no rap at all, but the slow, inevitable opening of the door, and then . . .

But as his thoughts brought him to this point James Fletcher rebuked himself severely. How worse than futile it was to lie there filling his brain with vain imaginings, dangerously vain imaginings, bearing in their train the nucleus of a nervous breakdown. And this was no time to run the risk of nerve defection: to do so would be as fatally foolish as suicide itself.

James Fletcher was not the type of man to whom the thought of self-destruction had ever made any urgent appeal. True, there had been times . . . never, he hoped fervently, to be repeated, could he but bring to a successful termination the scheme that was now occupying him . . . when the thought of death had not been too displeasing: yet, even so, he had been very far from the desire to inflict it on himself. And now, when the carrying out of that plan which had been simmering in his brain for over a week, ever since that incredible evening on the boat when he had first conceived it, was so near to a triumphant completion, now was no time to lessen his own chances of success by any unnerving forebodings. He must be master of himself, able to talk, able to threaten, able to convince with that tortuous skill which had brought so much grist to his mill in the days that had gone.

For, otherwise, why should he have listened so eagerly to the instructive information which had fallen so glibly from the drunken lips of the man, Dickson, whose glass he had been at such pains never to leave unfilled: why should he have thought and schemed, dared and succeeded in the days that had followed, those days which had ended thus, brought him at last to the room he had resolved to occupy in this palatial hotel in the little Scottish town? And as he pondered this thought James Fletcher smiled. Through his mind, as on some cinema screen, ran the scenes through which this last mad adventure had taken him. One by one they flitted past, and with that little exultant smile ever upon his lips he recalled them all, staring before him with thoughtful eyes, the smoke from his cigarette curling up to the ceiling in fantastic spirals.

He saw it now, that corner of the stuffy smoking-room upon the boat, *The Neptune,* that boat which had brought him, and incidentally Dickson, across the blue waters of the Mediterranean to the port of Marseilles. He remembered how their acquaintance had started: how it had progressed: how it had terminated—always with the invitation to a drink, always with the immediate emptying of a bottle. What a slave to Bacchus the wretched man had been! Fletcher laughed to himself, a cruel laugh. Well, the god had now one votary the less: his servant had been too indulgent.

They had been attracted to each other from the start, Dickson and he: drawn together as by some mystical link that lay between them. And a link there had been, a link of lawlessness, a bond of crime that had cut them off entirely from the remainder of the passengers upon that boat. They had been birds of one feather, men of the same calibre, of the same profession:

their sole capital the wits within their heads, their sole business the preying upon their kind. And, with an instinctive knowledge which needed only a few drunken words of Dickson to corroborate, Fletcher, far more astute than was his companion, had recognized this link from the very start.

In the days that followed, those steaming, airless days upon the little steamer, it had not taken him long to discover the business on which this man was now bent. A braggart as are all drunkards, under-estimating always the wits of another, it had been easy for Fletcher to lure him on to talk, easy to understand from the significant words he had let fall, the mysterious errand that was driving him back to Britain, enticing him on this journey of several hundred miles to the little Scottish town. No love of golf was drawing him to St. Andrews. Men of Dickson's trade give up their souls to no such unmercenary worship ; life for them provides all the essentials of a game of golf, all its handicaps, all its bunkers, but in a degree so intensive as to make the game itself deadly tame in comparison.

Little by little Fletcher had gained his confidence, bought his friendship at the price of many drinks, wormed himself into his secrets with his own faked indiscretions. For had the stories Fletcher spun about his own past been true, then, indeed, Dickson might easily have used his weapon upon himself . . . his weapon that was blackmail. But Fletcher's stories had been faked, lies to lure the other into talking, tales to lure him into indiscreet speech.

Yet he had not spoken until that last night, the night before they were landing in Marseilles. As the spirals of smoke curled before his eyes Fletcher recalled the smoke-filled room upon the boat, where, outwardly completely drunk, yet in reality with cunning brain and sober head, he had listened eagerly to the fatal confidences of the drunken man. Oh, yes, he was going to be rich, was Dandy Dickson. " Dandy "—Fletcher recalled the nickname with a start. He remembered how it had overwhelmed him, appalled him almost that a man so unclean, a man so gross, should yet consider himself a fitting person to bear such a name. Had it ever been fitting ? As he stared at him Fletcher had wondered in his soul whether even a dozen years of consistent soaking, of the diligent pursuit of every vice, could so have changed a man as to make what was once, perhaps, a tribute to his smartness, merely a term provocative of ridicule and mirth. And as he had watched him, watched the drunken sot before him, almost a horror of the man had grown on Fletcher, a horror, also, of that fatal bond that bound them both together.

A blackmailer ; Fletcher had guessed it from the start, and in that last evening upon the boat his guess had turned to certainty. For, with each glass the foolish tongue became more loosened and before he slept that night James Fletcher was in possession of his secret. And in the lining of his coat, that coat which now hung upon the chair beside his bed, was sewn the foolscap envelope which, with a cynical glee, he had removed himself from the same position in the coat of Dandy Dickson.

Yes, the man's tongue had babbled, the man's fingers, clutching the very spot in which it lay, had betrayed his secret, and before the dawn a blank sheet of paper had been sewn up again within the lining of Dickson's coat, occupying the place of that letter which was now within his own, that letter which, so Fletcher had every reason to believe, represented honour, reputation, freedom, all indeed that rendered life worth living, to the man with whom that night he hoped to do business.

For a while Fletcher mused blissfully on the hours that had followed his stealing of the letter. In the early dawn they had arrived in Marseilles: before midday he was already in the air, staring down with triumphant eyes at the tiny toy train beneath, in which he knew Dickson had got a seat. He had gained two days by flying across—or so he had hoped—for in his drunken babblings Dickson had said that he would stay a day in Paris. He had been due back to-morrow—by which time Fletcher had hoped to be far away himself, bearing within his pocket the price of that letter. He had fixed his appointment for to-night, and in that had lain his only error . . . but a serious one. For had he but arranged it for the day before, Dickson's premature arrival would not have mattered: indeed, he might never have known of it. What had happened? How had the man discovered the exchange? Had he, perhaps, taken out the letter to gloat once more upon its damning contents? As he debated this point a broad grin spread slowly over Fletcher's face: much would he have given to have been present at that time, to have caught the expression of amazed bewilderment turning at last to furious rage which Dickson's none too expressive features must have betrayed at the sight.

But the grin vanished instantly: for James Fletcher knew that he was still in too precarious a position to view it with amusement. Laughter to be of permanent duration must be deferred—or so says the adage, and Fletcher was determined to abide by it. It was with a slight frown upon his brow that he looked back upon the tragic events of that afternoon. The fatal coming of Dickson: that unexpected shot: his own lunatic placing of the guilt upon himself: his sudden realization that another's hand had fired: and then—and here the frown cleared somewhat and was replaced by the vestige of a smile—his dawning understanding that the man who had fired could have been none other than the man whom he had come to see. And it was not only for an indiscreet letter that he would now have to pay.

With a stern hard face and calculating brain James Fletcher set himself to ponder . . . and to gloat about the price.

CHAPTER XIII

The Strange Visitor

AT about the time that Mr. Malcolm left the dining-room in order to answer the summons to the telephone, a figure dressed in dark clothes, with overcoat turned-up and soft hat pulled down well over the face, made its way around the corner of the hotel. It was now dark and the curtained windows of the dining-room allowed no light to escape to the outside world, save through an occasional chink in the blinds. The figure carefully avoided these intermittent shafts of light. His movements were not furtive, for it was obvious that he knew exactly what he proposed to do : but all the same he was at pains to remain unobserved. As far as possible, safety first with speed was evidently his motto.

He walked with rapid steps right to the end of the large building which formed the Supreme Hotel, and there he never hesitated. Clearly he was very well aware of the architecture of the building : as he moved swiftly along the last few steps it was noticeable that he glanced quickly around in all directions, but at that time of night St. Andrews was a city of the dead. The constant flow to and from the clubhouse of men in evening dress from the various hotels had not yet started, and the ordinary citizens of the town were closeted either in their own homes or in the public houses, and were not about.

This man, whose significant arrangement of his clothes and cautious avoidance of the occasional lights upon the pavement proclaimed him as one not anxious to be recognized, was just as obviously a man whose purpose was very clearly defined in his own mind. At the end of the Supreme Hotel there is erected a fire-escape which runs down the whole length of the building, reaching the ground at the corner of a side street. This fire-escape, however, has an iron door which is locked, and is further protected from the night marauder by the fact that a high iron railing surrounds the entire hotel some three yards from the building itself.

But the stranger was a man of agility and determination. It took him but a few moments to climb this railing and it was noticeable that he made no further attempt to conceal his movements, now that his avowed object must be manifest to the world. His previous quick glances had, no doubt, satisfied him that he was unobserved. He was over the railings and in the space between them and the building in a very little time: he was over the gate of the fire-escape and actually standing upon its lowest step equally as quickly. Evidently the man knew well the advantage of immediate and rapid action, for now he was right up against the shadow of the hotel itself and even though some passer-by might appear in the distance, it was unlikely, most unlikely, that his presence would now be remarked. He advanced up the steps making no noise, a fact for which the rubber soles of his shoes were only partly responsible—and reached the level of the first floor. But he made no attempt to try the door which was opposite the fire-escape at this point: evidently he was well aware that it would be locked. Instead he measured with his eye the distance between himself and the verandah which ran alongside the windows of the rooms upon this floor, and quickly making up his mind he took off, with arms outstretched. It was not a big jump, not one to be particularly proud of, but it had to be taken at several feet above the ground, and he was thankful for the darkness which prevented him from seeing the actual depth and thus strengthened his nerve. He landed upon the stone edging of the verandah and scrambled over with great rapidity: then he stood quite still, listening intently for any noise which might warn him that he had been seen or heard. But all was still: there came no sound through the darkness.

The man straightened up and taking a small clothes brush from his pocket he carefully brushed himself with it, so that there should be no sign upon his clothing to betray his unconventional method of entering the hotel. Then, very quietly, he tested the window of the room opposite him. It was locked. With a sigh of impatience more than of irritation, the man quickly moved to the other end of the verandah and tried the second window. This also failed to yield an entry. He wasted no time in attempting to force his way into the room : instead he poised himself on top of the verandah and jumped the three feet necessary to bring him to the next one. Here again he pursued exactly the same procedure as before and standing quite still listened intently : but again his ears reassured him. Once more he tried the window opposite him. This time he was more fortunate, for it was unlocked and he was able to open it. This he did very cautiously, more cautiously, indeed, than he had done anything else up to that moment of that evening ; for it seemed that such great care was unnecessary, in view of the fact that there was no light within. Gradually he inserted one leg and then the other, and a moment or so later found him standing in the darkened room.

Evidently the strange figure, sinister, perhaps, in his dark clothes and with his hat pulled down over his eyes, was well conversant with the geography of this room—it would almost seem, in fact, that he had entered the hotel in a like manner before—for he advanced . . . with one arm outstretched, it is true, in order to avoid any unexpected obstacle . . . diagonally across the floor towards the door. Here he paused and kneeling down withdrew the key from the lock. First he placed his eye to the hole and looked through, but all he could see was the wall of the lightened passage opposite. He then placed his ear close to the lock and listened intently. No sound came to him, and rising to his feet, very cautiously, very carefully he opened the door a bare six inches. Again he stood stock-still listening, but again no disquietening sound came to him, and removing his hat he peered warily around and into the passage. There was no one in sight, and with an abrupt movement he was through that door, had shut it to behind him and was walking along the corridor before anyone who might have been watching could have realized the method of his sudden advent.

. . . . .

A tap came upon the door of number thirty-seven. The man who had knocked stood waiting impatiently, but almost at once a voice from within bade him enter. He walked in and shut the door behind him.

" Ah ! Good evening, doctor."

It was Fletcher speaking.

" Good evening, Dickson. How's the ankle ? "

This medical visitor was the perfect practitioner with the perfect bedside manner. He was cheerful without being too cheerful : he was conversational without boring his patient :

his face wore a pleasant smile and he breathed confidence.

He advanced across the intervening space and sat down on a chair by the bed.

" I don't really know," said Fletcher. " It feels all right, but you strapped it up so tightly that I can't really feel anything."

The doctor smiled.

" I'd better have a look at it," he said. " Finished your dinner ? "

" Yes," said Fletcher. " Some time ago, in fact. I didn't feel inclined for very much."

" No. I quite understand. Perhaps not."

The doctor paused. He made no attempt to turn back the bedclothes in order to examine the ankle.

" Are you quite certain," he said, " that you have got to keep this appointment to-night ? "

" Quite, quite sure," said Fletcher, with a smile.

" Because it's a great pity," said the other. " You know the one thing absolutely essential for your ankle is complete rest. In going out to-night you're doing something for which I entirely refuse to take any responsibility."

" I quite understand," said Fletcher, with some irritation, " but you see it's tremendously important. I can't avoid it."

" Why can't you get the person—your business acquaintance—to come round here ? Tell him you've had an accident. I'll take him a message, if you like."

" No," said Fletcher. " No. It can't be done. I'm very sorry . . . but there are reasons."

" Quite," said the doctor.

And the affair for him was finished: the perfect medical practitioner was in no way inquisitive, had no desire to probe unnecessarily into his patients' affairs.

" Well, well, then, if you must—you must, but you're going to suffer a good deal of pain, and you're going to do your ankle no good."

" It's inevitable, doctor," said Fletcher, quietly, " quite inevitable."

The doctor looked at him for a moment, just long enough to imply that he thought it very strange, but again he made no attempt to probe further into matters which were not his own concern. He proceeded to get to work and in a very short space of time had undone the bandages which he had previously bound around the ankle, had removed the compress and his quick agile fingers were skilfully examining the trouble. Fletcher steeled himself to stand the pain which this involved.

Suddenly the doctor looked up.

" Dickson," he said, " this is going to be no fun."

" It already isn't any," said Fletcher, quietly.

" I know that—and it's going to be no fun at all when you try to go out. What about crutches? Got any? "

Fletcher laughed.

" No, of course not."

" I'll send them along. It's the only way you can possibly move. You mustn't put this foot to the ground. As it is it's madness, you know, madness."

He spoke rather pompously, he spoke rather as doctors do when laying down the law.

" I'm sorry," said Fletcher. " I'm sorry, doctor. I'm a filthy patient, I know. But there it is. I've got to keep this appointment."

" Very well," said the doctor, " very well, don't blame me. You'll be in bed for a fortnight instead of a week after it."

" Oh, nonsense," said Fletcher, with some irritation. " You doctors, you know, are so dreadfully pessimistic ! "

" Are we ? " said the doctor. " Are we ? Well, I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. The moment you rise from the horizontal—a position you occupy at the moment "—Fletcher smiled to himself at the implied lack of elementary knowledge which some doctors impute to their patients—" the blood will flow more freely, and . . . well, you won't have any fun."

" You've said that before," said Fletcher.

" Yes, Dickson, yes. Be patient with me. I'm doing it all for your good."

Fletcher laughed good-naturedly.

" I know you are," he said. " I'm so sorry, doctor. However . . . carry on ! Strap it up."

" Well," said the other, " if you've made up your mind you've made up your mind. Once again—don't blame me."

He set to work and soon had replaced the bandages over the new compress.

" Now listen, Dickson," he said. " Whatever you do you must not put that foot to the ground. I don't say it will do it a great deal of harm, unless repeated, but it will cause you a great deal of pain. I will return home and send the crutches along, and I'll pick them up to-morrow morning when I come. I trust I shan't find your foot any worse. I think it will help you up to a certain point if you take a small dose of this."

As he spoke he had replaced the bedclothes over Fletcher and had moved to the wash-hand stand in the corner of the room. Quickly he measured out a small dose of something from a bottle which he removed from his pocket, and then applied a little water. He brought the glass back to his patient.

" Drink this," he said.

" What is it ? " asked Fletcher.

" As a matter of fact, it's a stimulant which will keep you going if you do have a lot of pain. It will . . . shall we say, prevent you being sick."

" Prevent me fainting, you mean ? " laughed Fletcher, taking the glass.

" Well, I hope it won't be as bad as that, but it will help . . . help considerably."

Fletcher took the glass and drained it. He then returned it to the doctor who, after carefully washing it, replaced it on the wash-hand stand once more. Approaching the bed again he sat down by it.

" Dickson," he said, " once more and for the final time, are you determined on this madness ? "

" It isn't madness," said Fletcher. " Good God ! people have moved about with sprains long before now. And I must keep this appointment."

" All right," said the doctor, " all right. Think me fussy, if you like, but don't think me fussy to-morrow morning when it hurts you like hell."

" Like hell ? "

" Like hell, I said, and that's what I mean."

He paused for a moment and then took a cigarette-case from his pocket.

" Have a cigarette ? " he asked. " What time is your appointment ? "

" Ten o'clock," said Fletcher.

" I see," said the doctor. " Well, you've got plenty of time. Like me to help you to dress ? "

" No, don't bother. I shall be all right."

" I think you will," said the doctor, " . . . now. Yes, I think you will."

He watched Fletcher closely. He noticed the drooping eyelids.

" Doctor," said Fletcher suddenly, " doctor, what was it you gave me ? I'm feeling darned sleepy."

The doctor laughed.

" It may make you feel a little sleepy at first," he said, " but it's great stuff to pull you together."

" Doctor," said Fletcher, " *doctor* ! I can't . . . I can't keep my eyes open."

" No ? " said the doctor. " How strange ! "

" Doctor," Fletcher's voice was rising, " I've got to keep my eyes open. What have you given me ? "

" Oh, nothing very much," said the doctor quietly. " Nothing very much."

It was noticeable now that his voice was entirely different : a steely note had crept into it, a note of fierce joy at what he saw before him. His whole expression had changed : it was elated, jubilant and his eyes shone with a light which was almost hysterical in its triumphant exultation.

" Doctor," said Fletcher, and his voice was very weak, so weak that the other had to bend over him to catch what he said. " Doctor . . . what in God's name . . . what . . ."

But he could speak no more. He sank back upon the pillows . . . his eyes closed.

" Delightful," said the doctor, but he was speaking to himself and he knew it. " Quite delightful. And now, my friend . . . now I'll get to work."

He did.

For nearly twenty minutes he searched through every drawer in that room, for nearly twenty minutes he searched through every article of clothing he could find, feeling each with eager dexterous fingers, and at last he found what he sought sewn into the lining of the coat which Fletcher had been wearing that day. It took him but a moment to rip open the silk with the small scissors which he carried: it took him but a moment more to examine the contents of the envelope which he found there. Then quickly replacing the coat in its original position on the chair where he had found it, he returned to the wash-hand stand. Quietly placing another dose in the glass from the bottle which he drew from his pocket, he applied a little water and threw the contents out of the window. He then placed the glass on the small table by the bedside and the bottle on the wash-hand stand, having first carefully wiped both with his silk handkerchief and, lifting up Fletcher's limp hand to do so, impressing both articles with the finger-marks of the man in the bed. Returning to the water-jug upon the wash-hand stand the doctor carried out the same procedure with this, so that on all three objects only Fletcher's finger-marks could be found.

He then moved swiftly to the door, opened it gently and stood for a moment listening. There came no sound. Very cautiously he looked out. No one was in the passage. On the instant he was outside and had shut the door behind him.

. . . . .

The strange figure which had made its surreptitious entry into the hotel some little time before quickly returned to the room by which entrance had been made. Carefully the man surveyed the landscape: no one was in sight, not a sound could he hear: evidently everyone was still at dinner in the hotel and in most houses. He returned to the street by the way he had come, pulled his hat well over his eyes and turned his coat collar up even further: then, without a moment's hesitation he moved away and was quickly lost to sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

Inspector Varney is Awed

MR. MALCOLM walked across the lounge straight to the telephone-box and closed the door very carefully behind him, in order to make quite sure that the conversation which he was about to partake in would not be overheard. Mr. Malcolm lifted the receiver from its hook and placed it to his ear.

" Hullo ! " he said.

" Hullo ! Is that Mr. Malcolm ? "

" It is. That you, Varney ? "

" Yes, sir. Mr. Malcolm, we've opened that trunk."

" Yes ? " said Mr. Malcolm, a little tinge of excitement colouring his cheeks, a little quiver running down his spine.

" We found the body of a man inside it," said Varney's matter-of-fact policeman's voice.

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm.

" You expected that, didn't you, sir ? "

" I thought it was more than a bare possibility," said Mr. Malcolm, choosing his words carefully. " That was why I suggested that you should investigate the trunk. The man whom you found, Varney, was between thirtyfive and forty, sandy-haired, about five feet eight, and had been dead for something like eight hours."

" Good God ! "

Mr. Malcolm smiled. It amused him to startle his colleagues whenever he could : it amused him that these worthy and intelligent official detectives should always be so surprised when he produced a bombshell of this description. For all that he had done was to describe, very loosely, the man who called himself Dickson and who was occupying room number thirty-seven upstairs in the hotel at that moment. It had been a shot in the dark, Mr. Malcolm being convinced that for the impersonation which the man upstairs had successfully carried out it was probable he bore some physical resemblance to the original.

" The doctor . . ." came Varney's voice.

" Who is there with you now ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Yes—who is here with me now, is not quite sure about the eight hours."

" Never mind," said Mr. Malcolm, " nine or seven will do."

He heard Varney laugh.

" But the man was shot through the back."

" What ? " said Mr. Malcolm.

" He was shot through the back."

" What a nasty cowardly thing to do to him," said Mr. Malcolm.

Again Varney laughed.

" Listen, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " What do you want me to do ? "

" Well," said Mr. Malcolm, " I've let you in on the ground floor of a murder. I've let you know within eight hours, shall we say, of the accomplishment of the crime. What does a policeman usually do when he discovers a corpse in a trunk ? "

" Makes inquiries," said Varney, knowing his Mr. Malcolm, " with regard to the identity of the deceased and thereby traces, if possible, his friends and acquaintances, his history, his troubles and his joys."

" Quite poetical ! " said Mr. Malcolm.

Varney ignored it.

" Can you save me that trouble, Mr. Malcolm ? "

" No," Mr. Malcolm said, smiling broadly to himself as he spoke. " No, I can't, Varney, beyond the fact that the man went by the name of Dickson. I don't think you will be able to find any of his friends or acquaintances, any of his troubles or his joys, but I should strongly advise you to try—it would help very much indeed. Wire to London . . . wire everywhere. Don't be thrifty and waste chances."

" Dickson—did you say ? " asked Varney : evidently he was writing down the name.

" I said Dickson. I understand from the manager of this hotel that it is spelt D—I—C—K—S—O—N and not in the more abbreviated manner. But I have another suggestion, Varney."

" Yes, Mr. Malcolm ? "

" I would suggest that you should have inquiries made in regard to a telegram which was forwarded this afternoon from the King Street Post Office, Edinburgh to the Supreme Hotel, St. Andrews. It was signed ' Dickson.' Try to obtain an accurate description of the person who handed it in."

" King Street Post Office," repeated Varney quickly.

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm. " And I would suggest that you should then get into that fast car that we were talking about a short time ago, the last time we held telephonic communication in fact, and come to St. Andrews at once."

" To have a conference ? " said Varney eagerly.

" No," said Mr. Malcolm, " not exactly. To have a conference, certainly, but that is not the chief idea. To catch the murderer."

" Good God," said Varney again. " Have you got him there, Mr. Malcolm ? "

" I haven't got him here, but he is here all the same. He's just had an accident. I don't think he'll be able to move very fast."

" Shall I come with a warrant ? " asked Varney.

" Come with a warrant," said Mr. Malcolm, " but don't be prepared to execute it at once.

We may have to unleash a little of the coil of rope."

" I don't quite understand ? "

The Inspector's voice sounded puzzled.

" I don't blame you," said Mr. Malcolm. " I don't quite understand myself. That's the point. As soon as I do understand . . . as soon as I really have proof, then you can get on with it, with your warrant."

" Oh, I see—merely a case of suspicion ? "

" Very strong suspicion," said Mr. Malcolm.

For a moment there was a pause, then Inspector Varney's voice again came over the wire.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " of course I can't tell you how grateful I am. This is a marvellous performance . . . but will you answer one more question ? "

" Why, certainly," said Mr. Malcolm.

" Mr. Malcolm." Inspector Varney's voice sounded almost awed. " Do you come from heaven or from hell ? "

" I don't know," said Mr. Malcolm. " It depends entirely on the point of view."

He rang off.

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Malcolm enters a Lady's Room

A TAP came upon the door of the manager's office. Even as he opened his mouth to give the customary words of invitation, the door was flung open and Mr. Malcolm entered.

There was an obvious purpose about his entry, a subtle atmosphere of subdued excitement in his whole demeanour, and as the manager recognized the visitor his own face became a trifle downcast and his spirits drooped. Already his nerves, over-strained by the events of that afternoon, had caught the excitement in the other—but with a difference. For Mr. Malcolm felt nothing but a deep, an almost intellectual interest in this curious affair which had happened in the hotel; while to the manager's mind the whole thing was an affront against himself personally, a definite menace to the prestige of the place. Thus it was that he viewed Mr. Malcolm's rapid entry with an entire lack of his former ingratiating politeness: ever since Mr. Malcolm had tacitly refused to accept his own convenient explanation of the matter—a fabrication on the part of an hysterical girl—he had lost favour in the manager's eyes. From an influential friend he had now become a formidable foe ; a foe, in that he would not rest, the manager knew it, until he had sifted the affair to the very bottom, fitted together each smallest detail of evidence until it might form a damning whole, no matter how damaging such a result might be to the hotel itself. The man was too dispassionate, too composedly determined, and once again the manager repented bitterly that he had ever solicited his aid.

These thoughts were but ill-concealed by a forced smile which did little to brighten the general gloom of his countenance as, within a moment of Mr. Malcolm's entrance, the manager rose to his feet.

" Oh, it's you, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " I . . . I hope there's no bad news. Won't you sit down ? "

" Thanks." Slowly, easily, Mr. Malcolm sank into the armchair which it had now become his habit to occupy when visiting the manager in his office ; slowly, thoughtfully he turned and stared at the heated little man before him, who had now reseated himself in his own chair by the desk, one foot tapping the carpet agitatedly, the fingers of one hand beating an impatient tattoo upon the papers strewn before him. For a long moment he was silent, as though in the act of marshalling his thoughts, or perhaps engaged upon unravelling some baffling problem, for his brow was drawn in a pensive frown. And as he watched him, gradually, almost imperceptibly, the irritation crept away from the manager's face. There was something about Mr. Malcolm's deep absorption, a certain intensity, a certain impersonal calculation, which allowed no room for pettiness and futile forebodings. In spite of himself the manager became interested, acutely interested, eager to know, never mind at what cost, the errand upon which he had come.

" Any news ? " he asked at last, and it was significant that this time the question was not couched in the negative, and the quality of such news was not stressed.

Mr. Malcolm smiled : it was a very charming smile which lit up his features to an astonishing degree, and by its mere friendliness dispelled a little of that load of suspense which still lay heavily upon the other's heart.

" I'm sorry you thought the whole affair was satisfactorily cleared up," he said, a note of sympathy had crept into his voice, a sympathy, however, which was entirely feigned, for even as he said the words his smile had broadened.

" You . . . you mean . . . ? "

But he got no further, for with a sudden movement Mr. Malcolm leaned forward over the desk and interrupted him briskly.

" I mean that your Mr. Dickson arrived in Edinburgh all right . . . arrived *with* his luggage."

He paused. The manager looked puzzled.

" Not *with* his luggage," he said slowly.

" Don't you remember ? He sent a telegram for it . . ."

" He didn't," broke in Mr. Malcolm imperturbably, " but somebody else did."

Again he paused and looked at the manager, but the little man was still far from understanding.

" But I don't follow," he began excitedly. " What on earth makes you think someone else sent it ? "

" Because . . ."—Mr. Malcolm's voice was very calm, very deliberate, " because Mr. Dickson arrived with his luggage . . . *in* that trunk."

For a moment the two men stared at each other, and then in the same significant, unemotional tones Mr. Malcolm added :

" His dead body was in that trunk."

Not until then had the manager understood. His face became white and stony : a second he remained thus as though incapable of speech or movement, but then the blood raced swiftly to his cheeks and he jumped to his feet excitedly. Against this unchallengeable fact all his incredulity and hope fell from him like a discarded garment : in its place panic, a delirious, hysterical and most undignified panic, seized his soul. Oblivious to all else save the good name of his hotel, he beseeched, implored and prayed Mr. Malcolm to keep the ruining facts out of the papers, to allow no rumour of this ghastly event to steal through the place and ruffle its genial calm: in any case, to conceal the whole affair until Championship week was safely over and the hotel emptied of many of its guests. To all of which Mr. Malcolm made reassuring replies, replies, however, to which the other, in the full tide of his feverish eloquence, paid no regard.

At last, realizing that the only way to stem the torrent was by the erection of a dam of fear, Mr. Malcolm ceased to reassure, and rising swiftly from his seat he walked to the door, waited a moment and then opened it.

On the instant the manager became silent. Wiping his brow with a shaking hand he waited, motionless and breathless, while Mr. Malcolm, smiling inwardly at the success of his manœuvre, went through a pantomime deeply significant to the watcher inside, a pantomime of peering cautiously around the corner of the door, first one way and then the other, and at last shutting it gently again and returning with a grave face to his former seat within the capacious armchair.

The manager looked at him dubiously: he knew himself to have been at fault. While imploring secrecy he had flung it to the winds, while beseeching silence he himself had waxed dangerously loquacious. In a voice lowered now almost to the verge of a whisper, he spoke anxiously:

"Was . . . was anyone there . . . listening?"

And as Mr. Malcolm shook his head the manager continued, still in the same hushed tone:

" I'm sorry, Mr. Malcolm, it . . . it was very foolish of me. I beg your pardon . . . but . . . well, you see, I am a little upset . . ."

" But of course, of course. It's only natural," burst in Mr. Malcolm genially. " Though really there's nothing to get excited about, you know . . . at least not yet. Naturally I shall keep silent about the whole affair: as a matter of fact "—and the smile that parted Mr. Malcolm's lips now was a trifle mischievous—" I must insist on absolute silence from you. Not a word must be said to anyone about this . . . no one must know what has occurred, not even Miss Gaynor—unless it is essential to bring her into it. But I don't think it will be. I have a very clear idea about this affair and I propose to deal with it in my own way."

Very much chastened and subdued by the adroit manner in which Mr. Malcolm had thus turned the tables on himself by insisting upon his silence also, the manager hastened to make reply.

" It couldn't be in better hands, Mr. Malcolm. I'm convinced of that."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" And so am I," he said lightly. " That makes it unanimous! Isn't that nice! "

He paused a moment and when he continued the lightness had vanished from his voice: he spoke briskly now with an undertone of authority to which the other was quick to respond.

" Now there are one or two things I want to know," he said quietly. " First of all, have you ever seen Mrs. Thurloe talking—you know the lady I mean ? The one who wears that elaborate evening dress with the green sequins ? "

The manager looked surprised : the conversation had taken an unexpected turn.

" Yes, yes," he said quickly. " I know whom you mean."

" Well, have you ever seen her talking with Dickson—the one upstairs with the sprained ankle ? Think now . . . at any time have you ever seen them addressing a single word to each other . . . a nod of greeting . . . a smile . . . anything to show that they are acquainted ? "

There was silence for a moment, and then the manager shook his head.

" No," he said, and his voice was firm and convinced. " No. I never have."

Mr. Malcolm nodded : it was obvious that this was the reply he had been expecting.

" Now I want you to make absolutely sure of that," he said slowly. " Ask every one on the staff who comes in contact with the guests . . . the waiters . . . chambermaids . . . every one. Do it tactfully, of course, but don't let tact interfere with the gathering of information. I never do, myself."

Mr. Malcolm possessed that rare quality which commands an unquestioning obedience to a given order. Without hesitating for one moment the manager rose to his feet and moved towards the door.

" I'll wait for you here," went on Mr. Malcolm : and then with a smile he added : " I think one of your cigars and possibly a whisky and soda while I am waiting ! "

The manager hastened to lay all that was desired before him and then went quickly from the room.

The end of his cigar was glowing richly, his glass had been emptied long since, when at last Mr. Malcolm, who had been deep in thought, looked up as the door opened once more and the manager entered. A glance at the latter's face was sufficient :

" No one has seen them together ? " said Mr. Malcolm quickly.

" Not a soul, Mr. Malcolm, not a soul. I've questioned every one likely to meet with either of them and not a soul has ever seen them even nod in greeting."

" Right."

With the monosyllable Mr. Malcolm dismissed the matter as one that had now been settled.

" And now," he said, carefully knocking the ash from his cigar into a tray which lay before him on the desk, " do you think there would be any objection to our examining Mrs. Thurloe's room ? "

The manager looked worried.

" But of course there is," he cried excitedly.

" We can't go there without her permission, and how can we get that without telling her all about this affair? In which case "—and he shuddered visibly—" the whole hotel would know all about it within ten minutes."

Mr. Malcolm laughed.

" You don't appear to have a very high regard for the lady's powers of reticence," he remarked blandly.

But the manager refused to treat the matter lightly.

" No lady is ever reticent," he answered with conviction, " when it's a question of either crime or clothes."

Mr. Malcolm bowed his approval.

" Magnificently put," he agreed smilingly, " though I hope not strictly accurate. However, I don't think there will be any need for us to put the lady to the test. What's to prevent our just going up there at once . . . particularly as she and her husband are now playing bridge? "

The other looked astonished.

" But how on earth do you know they're playing bridge? " he asked. " You've been here for the last half-hour, and before that . . ."

" . . . They were having dinner," put in Mr. Malcolm quickly. " Quite true, my dear sir, quite true! But, you see, I have a watch which tells me the hour and at this time every night Mr. and Mrs. Thurloe indulge in bridge —at least they do when they are staying here.

That's just one of the little advantages of being observant in this world . . . then you know exactly what certain people are likely to be engaged in doing at certain times."

He laughed at the manager's eloquent expression, and rising to his feet he moved slowly to the door.

" By the way," said Mr. Malcolm, " this has already been a most instructive evening. For at last I've discovered the almost perfect cigar. May I take another ? "

And on the manager's eager insistence he carefully selected one from the box before him and placed it within an inside pocket.

" Now let us proceed to the card-room," said Mr. Malcolm, " and see whether my watch has told the time correctly."

The card-room in the Supreme Hotel is approached by way of the long dining-hall: thus it was a few minutes before they had reached it. One glance within, however, was entirely sufficient to convince them both that Mr. Malcolm's statement had been correct. The gleaming sequin frock was very much in evidence, almost painfully so. Mrs. Thurloe and her husband were partners at bridge.

" They'll be there for the next hour," murmured Mr. Malcolm softly, as he walked back with the manager through the deserted dining-hall. " Will you take the risk ? Let's go up there now and if we're found out . . . well, then, we'll have to explain the matter. But if we go now I see no reason why the necessity should arise."

" All right."

The manager spoke very softly, staring around to make quite certain that they were indeed alone. Suddenly he stopped and turning to Mr. Malcolm asked him the question that had lain uppermost in his mind for what seemed a very long time.

" But what do you want to go up there *for,* Mr. Malcolm ? " he asked.

A question which Mr. Malcolm capped with another.

" Can you tell me whether any article of furniture belongs exclusively to the room it is in ? Exclusively, mind ? "

And again the unexpectedness of the remark completely overwhelmed the little man.

" What . . . what on earth do you mean ? " he gasped, and he looked at Mr. Malcolm somewhat oddly, as though, indeed, he were not quite assured of his sanity.

" Only this," said Mr. Malcolm, and a tinge of impatience had entered his voice. " Would you be able to tell me whether any object . . . a chair . . . an eiderdown . . . a cushion . . . or a rug, for instance, had been changed from one room into another ? "

The manager shook his head doubtfully.

" It's very unlikely that I could," he murmured. " You see, the furniture is uniform throughout the hotel, the only difference being between double and single rooms."

Mr. Malcolm's face cleared miraculously: a look of real affection crept into his eyes as he looked at the little manager.

" The Thurloes' is a double room, of course ? " he said.

The other nodded.

" So you could tell whether a rug had been moved from a single to a double room ? "

" Yes," said the manager quickly, " there's a slight difference—an inch smaller either way, I believe, in the double-room rug, to make room for the larger bed."

" Marvellous," said Mr. Malcolm cheerfully. " And now let us examine the size of the rug in the room of the bridge-playing Thurloes."

Without another word he led the way out of the room to the lift. A few minutes later they were standing in a pleasant, bay-windowed room upon the first floor, a room which, Mr. Malcolm noted, was very easy of approach from number thirty-seven.

Walking over to the rug before the fireplace he examined it carefully, and as he did so his hands trembled in a sudden excitement. But his voice was just as calm, just as unmoved when at last he arose and handed the rug to the manager.

" Well," he said, " does it belong to this room ? "

The other had slipped a measuring rule from his pocket and in a moment he had come to a decision.

" No," he said, " there's absolutely no doubt about it . . . this mat belongs to a single room."

Mr. Malcolm breathed a trifle quickly, and again the manager was reminded of his likeness to a hound upon the scent.

" And can you tell me," said Mr. Malcolm eagerly, " to what single room the mat belongs ? "

But here Mr. Malcolm was doomed to disappointment, for the manager shook his head.

" I'm afraid not," he said ; " it could belong to any single room."

Mr. Malcolm was thoughtful for a moment ; but then he looked up.

" It's all very interesting," he said, " and do you think it would be possible to have another rug put in here ? I should hate to spoil the look of the room and incur Mrs. Thurloe's displeasure. We owe that sequin-loving lady a very great deal."

The manager hesitated : there were so many questions he longed to ask, so much he wanted to be clear about, but a glance at Mr. Malcolm's absorbed face warned him that the time for gratifying his curiosity had not yet come.

" Certainly," he said, " certainly, Mr. Malcolm. I'll have another rug put in here at once."

" You'd better get it now," replied Mr. Malcolm thoughtfully. " And I should be very much obliged if you would bring me a large piece of brown paper at the same time . . . and perhaps a little string."

The manager did not wait to ask for reasons : instead he walked swiftly to the door and closed it gently behind him.

Alone in the room Mr. Malcolm occupied himself in a curious fashion. Slipping a magnifying glass from his pocket, he proceeded to make a careful examination of the rug before him. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he rose at last to his feet and slipped the little glass back into his waistcoat.

Even as he did so the manager entered. In one hand he carried a roll of paper tied about with string, and in the other a rug similar in appearance to that which lay upon the floor, but as Mr. Malcolm placed one beside the other he noticed that this new rug was indeed somewhat smaller. With deft fingers he rolled up the single-room rug and placed it in the brown paper, tied this up carefully and then rose to his feet. He glanced swiftly around to make quite sure that they had left no traces of their unconventional visit, and then together the manager and he moved to the door and out of the room.

A few minutes later they were back in the manager's office. But Mr. Malcolm did not sit down : instead he remained standing beside the door, the paper parcel tucked beneath his arm. He looked at the clock upon the manager's desk.

" I'm expecting Inspector Varney of the Edinburgh Criminal Investigation Department to call on me to-night. He should be here very shortly," he said. " Will you please ask him to wait for me . . . and you might supply him with some suitable refreshment : I'm afraid he'll have had a somewhat cold drive this evening. I'll be back as soon as I possibly can. So long."

Seeing that this extraordinary man was about to walk calmly out of the hotel accompanied, apparently, by that seemingly inoffensive rug which had been causing them both so much bother, the manager was filled with dismay. There were a thousand-and-one questions he was longing to ask, a thousand-and-one things about which he yearned for information, not the least of them being the sudden importance of that single-room rug. And here was the one man who could salve his curiosity blandly walking away without the slightest compunction. It was too much.

" But . . . but where are you going ? " he managed to gasp, and his voice was eloquent of the resentment in his mind.

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" As a matter of fact," he said, and his tone was jubilant ; it was obvious that the other's perplexity did not displease him, " I'm going to the University. I believe they have some very nice laboratories there . . . and I want to find out what made this stain."

He turned on the last word and was about to open the door, but the manager spoke quickly, so quickly that the words came almost as a cry:

" What stain ? " he asked. " I didn't see a stain ? "

Again Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" Ah, but *I* did," he said, and he laughed a little mischievously. " You see . . . but you haven't seen. I have the advantage of having a trained eye."

The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

Inspector Varney is Forestalled

THE sky was adorned as for a full dress occasion—thousands of stars studding its velvety blackness—when at last Mr. Malcolm emerged from the stately buildings of the University and ran lightly down some steps leading to the street. As he did so he breathed deeply of the keen night air and sighed with pleasure. For the last hour and a half he had been busily engrossed inside the laboratories he had just left, and the change to the freshness of the evening was very welcome. Under his arm he still carried that bulky brown-paper parcel, and as he walked he whistled gently to himself.

For Mr. Malcolm was feeling pleased: Mr. Malcolm was feeling elated: Mr. Malcolm was, in fact, highly content with his evening's work. His suspicions had been only too well founded. All that he had hoped for, all that he had dimly surmised that the rug might divulge, it had indeed revealed. Mr. Malcolm felt that there was very little wherein the rug itself had been concerned, regarding the events of that strange day, of which he still remained in ignorance. The smile that played around his lips was entirely triumphant.

But as his rapid walk brought him within sight of the Supreme Hotel, the smile vanished and into his keen eyes there came an intent, watchful look. Mr. Malcolm was deep in thought : having now solved the riddle that had first been suggested to him by the gleaming of an emerald sequin, his brain was already engaged upon fitting this solution to the theory he had evolved in relation to that dead body in the lift, that body which had so startled the fair eyes of Marilyn Gaynor. Already, after his brief indulgence in a smile of self-congratulation, Mr. Malcolm was engrossed upon the next step he was to take.

Deeply absorbed in these thoughts he began to walk quickly up the drive leading to the hotel, and it was not until he had been greeted twice that he looked up with a start and realized he was no longer alone. By his side strode a tall, spare man whom Mr. Malcolm immediately recognized as the doctor in attendance upon the unfortunate Mr. Dickson of room number thirty-seven.

" Ah, good evening, doctor," he said. " And how's the patient ? Still doomed to his bed ? "

" I'm afraid so," said the other, and again Mr. Malcolm was pleasantly struck by the cultured tones of his voice. " He's got a very nasty sprain. I'm going in to see him now. I said I'd come again after dinner . . . but I don't hope for much improvement."

He shook his head dubiously.

" I'm sorry about that," said Mr. Malcolm untruthfully ; " he told me he hoped to get out to-night . . . to keep an appointment."

But the doctor laughed.

" Yes," he said. " I'm going along now to see if I can patch him up a bit . . . enough to go out, anyway, but "—he shook his head —" I'm not feeling very optimistic."

" But aren't you going a bit late ? " said Mr. Malcolm casually.

The doctor nodded.

" Yes," he said. " I had hoped to get along nearly an hour ago . . . but you know what a doctor's life is like. Everybody seems to get ill at once, and to-night my consulting-room was packed."

" Not a flu epidemic, I hope, doctor," said Mr. Malcolm apprehensively. " I should have thought St. Andrews was a healthy town, or . . ."—and Mr. Malcolm smiled mischievously —" perhaps it would be—if it weren't for its doctors ! "

But Mr. Malcolm's little sally did not meet with the good-humoured response he had expected. Indeed, as soon as he had spoken the words he had cause to regret them, for on the instant the man by his side stopped dead in his tracks and stood staring at him indignantly. There was a strange light shining in his eyes, an intent look upon his face which was anything but pleasant, and when he spoke his tone was harsh.

" And what exactly do you mean by that extraordinary remark ? " he asked.

Mr. Malcolm had also stopped and now he looked at his companion with unfeigned surprise.

" Why, nothing, nothing at all, doctor," he said quickly. " It was merely intended as a joke . . . although, I admit, rather a stupid one. But I never imagined for a moment that you'd take it seriously."

But already the other seemed to have repented of his momentary outburst. His lips curved into a smile, a smile, however, which had no reflection in the small bright eyes that stared so keenly into those of Mr. Malcolm.

" Forgive me," he said : and they continued their walk towards the hotel. " I'm a bit overtired this evening . . . been working too hard. I'll have to try some of my own tonics, I'm afraid."

He laughed. Mr. Malcolm echoed the sound, and his tone when he spoke was quite casual and friendly : it was as though the little misunderstanding had never occurred.

" Please convey my deepest sympathy to your patient," he said. " And I hope you'll find him better."

" So do I," said the doctor, " but . . ."

And again he shook his head.

They had arrived at the entrance to the hotel, and here they parted. For a moment Mr. Malcolm watched the doctor's spare figure mounting the stairs, and then, turning on his heel, he walked briskly towards the manager's office. Before he had reached it, however, the little man came towards him. It was obvious he had been lying in wait for Mr. Malcolm's return: it was equally obvious that the manager of the Supreme Hotel was suffering from the most intense nerve strain. He had quite lost control over the movements of his hands: they gesticulated wildly, the fingers fluttering interminably like leaves in the teeth of a gale, while his eyes, fearful and a little bloodshot, darted anxious glances in every direction even as he spoke. His voice was pitched low to the level of a whisper, but a hoarse whisper of the stage variety, far more betraying than would have been an ordinary tone of voice. Mr. Malcolm was thankful that the hall was empty of guests, for with his every action the manager was defeating his own ends, with his very appearance he was blazoning abroad the fact that something untoward had occurred.

" You've been a very long time, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " The Inspect . . . the gentleman you were expecting is waiting in my office . . . there's another gentleman with him . . . I thought it best to take them there in case they might be recognized by anyone . . . I . . ."

But Mr. Malcolm broke in quickly.

" Quite right. I'm sorry I've been so long —it couldn't be helped, however."

As he spoke Mr. Malcolm gently urged the manager towards his office, for although the hall was empty of guests the reception clerk was still seated at his desk, casting strange glances towards the pair, and it was with a sigh of relief that Mr. Malcolm closed the door behind them both.

At once there was the sudden scraping of chairs upon the floor, as two men jumped to their feet. Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" Ah, good evening, Varney," he said. " So you got here all right. Been waiting long ? "

The taller of the two men shook Mr. Malcolm briskly by the hand.

" Good evening, Mr. Malcolm," he said, and there was a deference in his voice which the manager did not fail to note. " No . . . not long. Just about ten minutes or so." He turned to the man by his side. " This is my colleague—Inspector Baird."

A short, jovial-looking man whose only outward claim to distinction lay in a pair of very shrewd, very intent blue eyes, came forward and greeted Mr. Malcolm warmly. There was a respect in his manner which the latter found distinctly gratifying.

Mr. Malcolm did not sit down : turning to the two men before him he said quickly :

" Let's go along to my room straight away. We can go up by the lift, and as there aren't many people about now I don't think there's much risk of you two being recognized."

He moved to the door and then turned towards the manager, who was looking very wistful and disappointed at being thus debarred from this important conference.

" There are one or two points I want to clear up with Inspector Varney," he said, " and then we will come back to this office. In the meantime I should be glad if you could remain here and wait for us, Mr. Dakers, as I don't want to chance missing you when we return."

Somewhat cheered by the implied suggestion that he should eventually be allowed to join the little party, the manager was quick to agree. He had no suspicion as to Mr. Malcolm's real reason—a desire that his tell-tale face should remain hidden from the curious eyes of his guests for as long as possible.

Without more ado Mr. Malcolm led the way to the lift and then along to his room upon the first floor. When they were all seated he turned to Inspector Varney.

" Well, any further news ? " he asked.

But the Inspector shook his head.

" Very little, Mr. Malcolm, very little, except . . ."

Mr. Malcolm interrupted him quickly.

" I think perhaps that you'd better just tell the facts exactly as they happened, Varney," he said. " You only gave me a very sketchy account over the telephone, you know."

The other nodded.

" Right, Mr. Malcolm. I will."

He paused for a moment and then continued briskly.

" Just after your 'phone call I went with a doctor to the Waverley Station and removed the trunk to the police station, where I opened it. It was a large trunk and at first I thought it contained nothing but clothes, for a light coat and a rug lay on the top. But under these was the body of a middle-aged man of medium build. He'd been shot in the back some eight hours before. Neither the bullet nor the weapon were in the trunk."

" Did you find anything else . . . any papers ? " asked Mr. Malcolm curtly.

But the Inspector shook his head.

" Nothing, Mr. Malcolm, nothing but the coat and the rug. In the pockets of the coat, however, there were two articles . . . a pocket handkerchief, unmarked, and a pair of driving-gloves."

" I see . . ."—Mr. Malcolm paused—" and was there a tab on the collar of the coat ? "

The Inspector nodded.

" Yes," he said, " it was bought in Cairo."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm again, rather thoughtfully. " And that's all your news, Varney ? "

" No, not quite, Mr. Malcolm." The other spoke quickly ; it was obvious that he had now something to tell which he considered important, something that he hoped would appear equally as vital to the man before him. " After my second telephone conversation with you I got through to Scotland Yard and gave a description of the dead man, asking if they had any information about him, his name being Dickson. I then got on to the King Street Post Office and asked them to trace that telegram. They were some time doing this and then they gave me a description of the man who handed it in."

Inspector Varney paused dramatically for a moment and when he continued his voice was very firm, very deliberate.

" The description, Mr. Malcolm, tallied in every way with that of the dead man himself . . . in every way."

He paused again and looked at Mr. Malcolm as though expecting some word or sign of astonishment: but he got neither. Instead the other merely nodded his head as though he had long foreseen such a possibility.

" Quite," he said, slowly, " quite. Well, Varney, and what then ? "

There was the smallest trace of disappointment in the other's voice as he continued.

" Just as I was leaving to come along here a call came through for me from London. They had traced the man Dickson."

By a sudden glint that leapt to the eyes of the man before him, Inspector Varney knew that now at least he had gained that interest and attention which his last hoped-for thunderbolt had failed so lamentably to achieve.

" He was mixed up in an affair of blackmail two years ago," he continued, " but he got off with six months. Demanding money with menaces, they had to call it. There was some doubt in the matter, but from all accounts he was a pretty bad egg. They're going to send me full details of the affair to-night."

He paused and looked at Mr. Malcolm in surprise: for the latter was staring at him thoughtfully and his smile was curious. Very much did Inspector Varney long to understand what lay behind that smile, but he knew his man too well to dare to question him. For a long moment there was silence and then Mr. Malcolm spoke.

" I see," he said, and his voice was very quiet. " I see."

Then rising from his chair he paced up and down the room thoughtfully as though deliberating on his next move, and suddenly he stopped and faced the two inspectors.

" Varney," he said, " I told you over the telephone that your man was here. He is here, but whether I've got enough proof to justify an arrest . . . I'm still not certain. For myself, I'm convinced that he's the man we're after—and I'll give you my reasons."

" Just a moment," said Varney quickly. " If this man is in the hotel we'd better see that he doesn't escape, hadn't we? No matter whether we've got enough evidence or not? "

But Mr. Malcolm shook his head.

" He won't escape," he said reassuringly. " He can't, you see. He's in bed, at the moment, with a badly sprained ankle."

" How bad ? " asked Varney, unconvinced.

" Oh, pretty bad. The doctor is with him now. I met him going up and he said there was small chance of the man being able to get about for some time. We'll have a chat with the doctor afterwards, but you needn't worry, Varney. Your bird won't escape. He's caged quite effectively, as it is."

Varney smiled.

" Right, Mr. Malcolm. Sorry I interrupted you : you were about to give us your reasons for suspecting him."

Mr. Malcolm nodded. He was silent for a moment and neither of the inspectors ventured to speak. It was obvious that now Mr. Malcolm had fully captured their attention. They sat motionless, their eyes riveted on his face. Mr. Malcolm moved back to his chair and sat down. He thought for a moment as though to marshal his ideas, and then he continued rapidly :

" First of all, the man who is dead was named Dickson. He wired from Marseilles, booking a room in this hotel. Room number thirty-seven was kept for him and was given to another man by mistake. This mistake was entirely due to this second individual who gave the name Dickson and more or less suggested that he had engaged a room. The two men were of the same build, and to my mind it was an obvious attempt at impersonation of the real Dickson on the part of this other man."

Varney was writing in his notebook and Mr. Malcolm paused for a moment before continuing. Then :

" My second point is this : On learning about the strange mistake regarding this room I went up to see this Dickson. It was then that I became really suspicious. For I soon found out that he had never been near the great golf match that was played this afternoon, and yet he insisted that he had been present the whole time. All his remarks proved otherwise, however. So you see he was anxious to provide himself with an alibi. Why ? I think the reason is pretty obvious."

Again Mr. Malcolm paused while the Inspector made a note in his book.

" I then saw something glittering on the mat near the fireplace," he went on, " and I managed to pick it up without being observed. Later I realized that it was a small green sequin that had fallen from the dress of a Mrs. Thurloe who is staying here. I soon found out that this lady was quite unacquainted with Dickson, and on examining her room discovered that a single-room rug had been substituted for the slightly smaller rug which should have been in her room—which is a double room. This rug I have here——"

Mr. Malcolm pointed towards the brown-paper parcel which he had placed on a chair.

" I discovered that a portion of it had been carefully sponged in order, probably, to remove a stain. This stain, however, was not entirely obliterated and I have definitely proved that it was caused by blood. So there, Inspector Varney, you have my reasons. The obvious impersonation : the removal of the rug, and most damning of all—the vital reason for that removal. For myself I am inclined to think that we have ample evidence to warrant his arrest."

The other nodded : his eyes were shining with excitement, his breath came quickly.

" Yes," he said, " it's pretty glaring, isn't it ? And yet there's a risk. We can't hang him merely on this. And if I arrest him now . . . well, we'll be giving away our greatest advantage, the opportunity of keeping him under observation and thereby obtaining further proof."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm slowly, " yes, that was my difficulty, too. The only thing is he's tied to his room for the moment, anyway. And we can ask for a remand, in order to make all inquiries."

" Yes." Varney rose to his feet, and the other Inspector followed suit. " I certainly think I'm justified in asking this man whether there is any reason why I shouldn't arrest him. Shall we go along now ? "

Mr. Malcolm nodded. There was a gleam in his own eyes, a gleam which was the only witness to his inward excitement. He rose to his feet and moved to the door.

" We'll just go down first and warn the manager about it : I'm afraid it's going to upset him greatly. From his behaviour you'd think it was the first time a crime of any sort had ever been committed in so sacred a spot as an hotel."

They all laughed, and together they went quickly to the lift and back again to the manager's office.

The little man was still seated at his desk, and at their entrance he jumped up eagerly. Mr. Malcolm moved over to him and his voice was gentle.

" Mr. Dakers," he said, " I'm going to annoy you a lot. I'm going to desecrate the sanctity of the Supreme Hotel by having a man in it arrested for murder. That man is . . ."

But he got no further, for just at that moment there came a tap upon the door and one and all stiffened to attention. Mr. Malcolm nodded towards the manager.

" Come in," the latter murmured.

On the instant the door was flung open and a man walked into the room. There was an urgency about his manner which claimed the instant regard of all. It was the doctor to whom Mr. Malcolm had been speaking a little while before. For a moment he hesitated on the threshold of the room and looked around him in surprise, abashed almost by the eager-ness in the many eyes which met his own: and then, sighting the little manager, he walked over to him quickly. He was breathing unevenly as though in excitement, and as he stared at him Mr. Malcolm's pulse beat fast. He could see that the doctor was strangely moved, and this was a man, he sensed, who would allow few things to ruffle his calm. Even as the manager jumped up to face his visitor, Mr. Malcolm spoke:

"What is it?" he said. "What has happened?"

But the doctor remained standing before the manager, entirely ignoring the man who had spoken.

"I have some rather serious news to tell you," he said. "Some news which I think, Mr. Dakers, I should give to you alone—as manager of this hotel."

At the words the two Inspectors had risen to their feet and walked to the door, but Mr. Malcolm did not move.

"I think I will stay to hear it," he said curtly. "With the manager's consent, of course."

The little man broke in eagerly.

"But, of course . . . you can say what you like in front of Mr. Malcolm, doctor . . . and the others . . . they are . . ."

Mr. Malcolm interrupted him quickly.

"Has something happened?" he asked.

For the first time the doctor turned to him, for the first time he acknowledged his right to receive his news.

" Yes," he said, " yes. I'm afraid something has happened. I'm very sorry to say that Mr. Dickson of room thirty-seven has committed suicide."

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Malcolm gets on with the Case

MR. MALCOLM echoed the words.

"He committed suicide," he said. His voice was very low, however, and only Inspector Varney, who was standing by his side, overheard him. The Inspector looked at Mr. Malcolm and tried to guess from his expression what was passing through his mind, but beyond the fact that he was obviously preoccupied and his thoughts were far away, it conveyed nothing.

Actually Mr. Malcolm had cast his mind back to that scene on the stairs not so very long before, when suddenly he had been startled to hear a man falling behind him, when he had turned and reached him and when the man had uttered those strange words which had so lingered in his memory. "Good God! Who the hell did that?" But Mr. Malcolm did not allow supposition and reflection to delay him for the moment. Whatever the man Dickson had meant by those words, whether fear of something or somebody he dreaded, or whether he had merely uttered a casual exclamation of no significance whatsoever, Mr. Malcolm decided that for the present a further investigation of the doctor's news was to be desired.

He turned to the manager.

" I think," he said, " that we had better go at once to look at him."

There was authority in the tone in which he spoke the words, and the manager did not hesitate: he moved to the door immediately. The little procession followed him up the stairs to the door of number thirty-seven. But there the manager hesitated: evidently he did not relish the prospect of that sight which his eyes were about to see. He turned to the doctor.

" Did he . . . did he shoot himself? "

The doctor shook his head.

" No. He took an overdose of a sleeping-draught which I found by his bedside."

" How did he get that sleeping-draught? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" I gave it to him," said the doctor, " but I had also given him very full instructions as to how to use it. He was only to take a certain dose if he had a return of pain during the night."

" When did you give it to him? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Just before dinner," said the doctor. " I had it sent round from the chemist."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm. " And he overdid it? "

" Yes."

" On purpose? "

Mr. Malcolm's voice was casual and he did not appear to be looking at the doctor, but Inspector Varney recognized, perhaps by the very tonelessness of the words, that his brain had never been more on the alert.

" Frankly, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor, " I have no idea, but I can scarcely believe that it was anything but on purpose in view of the fact that the drug was extremely easy to take in the right proportions and that only a fool "—he paused significantly—" or a madman, would indulge in such a dose as Dickson must have taken."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm.

He advanced to the door, placed his fingers on the handle and opened it. He entered the room, closely followed by the doctor and Inspector Varney : Inspector Baird was not far behind, and rather hesitantly the manager of the hotel brought up the rear.

Mr. Malcolm walked quickly to the bed and cast one keen glance at the body of the man lying upon it : there could be no doubt but that what the doctor had said was indeed true and that Dickson, whom Mr. Malcolm had seen so recently, was dead. Very dead. He wasted no more time by the bedside but looked around the room, looked at the furniture, and for one fleeting second his gaze fell upon the rug lying in front of the fireplace. Mr. Malcolm seemed to measure it with his eyes and there was a faint smile in them when he turned away. But this smile lasted only for a second. Obviously Mr. Malcolm had been satisfied by something which he had noted in the size of that rug.

For a few moments there was silence. The two inspectors, the doctor and the manager of the hotel watched Mr. Malcolm as he made a leisurely circuit of the room, finally coming to anchor by the desk. No one broke the silence and Mr. Malcolm made no effort to do so. He stood there gazing down at that inoffensive piece of furniture with a concentrated stare which revealed the fact that he was deep in thought.

Then suddenly he turned.

" I think," he said, addressing the company generally, " it might be best if we all repaired to my room for a few minutes. There are certain things that I wish to discuss. Baird, I would like you to remain here : admit no one until we return."

All somewhat relieved at being able to leave the grim presence in that room, they moved quickly to the door and along the passage towards Mr. Malcolm's room. As soon as all were gathered within Mr. Malcolm turned to the little manager :

" Mr. Dakers," he said, " I'm sorry, but this thing can no longer be kept quiet. You quite understand that there will have to be an inquest, and you quite understand that you will probably have to give evidence."

" Me ? " said the manager. " But I . . ."

" You are the manager of this hotel," broke in Mr. Malcolm, " and if the coroner requires your assistance you will have to give it. The doctor here, of course, will also be required."

" Of course," echoed the doctor quietly.

Mr. Malcolm paused for a moment, deep in thought. Then :

" You're sure it wasn't some poison that he took ? " he asked suddenly. " Instead of the sleeping-draught ? Have you examined the residue in the glass ? "

The doctor nodded.

" Of course. I did so immediately, Mr. Malcolm," he said, " but it was the sleeping-draught all right."

" I see. Have you ever had a suicide before, doctor ? " asked Mr. Malcolm suddenly.

" Never," answered the doctor, " never—a successful one, that is."

He smiled.

Mr. Malcolm smiled in return.

" I understand. Well, I'm sorry, but there it is. The body had better be removed as soon as possible."

" Mr. Malcolm "—it was the manager of the hotel who spoke, and his voice was shaking —" Mr. Malcolm, please, could it wait just a little while ? You see, when somebody dies in an hotel it isn't a very good advertisement . . . it doesn't help exactly."

" No, no," said Mr. Malcolm. " At dead of night, I meant. You misunderstood me : I didn't mean my words to be taken so literally. When I said ' immediately ' I meant some time later on to-night. You see, Mr. Dakers, there are certain formalities which must be gone through in a case like this. The police require a certain investigation. As much as possible must be discovered about the dead man. Fortunately Inspector Varney is here. He will be able to take over. I will give him all the help I can, and you may rely on me to keep this as quiet as possible to-night, but to-morrow the thing is bound to come out."

"Yes," said the little manager, forlornly, "I know—dash it!"

"No need to be really disturbed," said Mr. Malcolm. "You know you are rather lucky. If it hadn't been this it might well have been the arrest of one of your guests for the murder of another."

"What?" said the doctor.

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

"There is more behind this suicide," he said, "than meets the eye. The man who killed himself has done so for a very good reason."

"So it was not a mistake?"

The man seemed to speak resentfully, rather as though he were indignant that Mr. Malcolm should have questioned him before on this very subject. But Mr. Malcolm only smiled, a very disarming smile.

"Doctor," he said, "you must forgive me, but I wanted to know first of all whether you thought it could have been a mistake. I mean, whether he could have done it accidentally or not. Your theory merely bears out my own, somewhat modified."

The doctor smiled.

" I understand," he said.

" I have to thank you, doctor," said Mr. Malcolm, " for coming directly to us. It has saved a great deal of trouble."

" I don't quite understand," said the little manager : evidently his thoughts were still upon that remark which Mr. Malcolm had made, the remark that perhaps he had been lucky in avoiding the scandal of an arrest for murder.

" The story is sordid, the story is unpleasant, as I see it," said Mr. Malcolm, " and I'm afraid that most of it will have to come out in the coroner's court. In these circumstances you cannot keep the affair quiet and I'll have to withdraw my promise to keep everything between ourselves."

For a moment the manager seemed to hesitate, but then he bowed to the inevitable.

" Very well, Mr. Malcolm. It's as you say. You know best."

Mr. Malcolm gave him a dazzling smile.

" How very nice of you," he said, " to take my word like that . . . but, much as I regret it . . . that is the situation."

He paused a moment, then continued quickly:

" Now, Mr. Dakers, before we all part for the night I think it would be a very good idea if we indulged in a drink. I wonder if you could let us have some glasses, soda water, some whisky, and perhaps a little brandy. Is that possible at this hour, do you think ? "

" Certainly, Mr. Malcolm, but certainly. I will see to it myself," said the little manager at once.

Without pausing a moment he darted swiftly from the room, to return in an incredibly short space of time with a laden tray, which he placed upon a table. Mr. Malcolm beamed at him.

" Thank you, Mr. Dakers," he said, " that is very kind of you."

Mr. Malcolm moved over to the table and picked up a glass. Apparently it did not meet with his approval, for he took out his silk handkerchief and gave it a quick but careful rub. Mr. Malcolm was very particular. Mr. Malcolm sighed to himself.

" It's funny," he said in a low voice and to nobody in particular, " how in even the best of hotels such details are neglected."

He then replaced the glass upon the table and turned to the doctor.

" Do you mind helping yourself ? " he said. " I find it so much better where a drink has to be mixed, because people know exactly the strength that they prefer."

With a smile, the doctor came over and lifting the glass helped himself to a generous allowance of brandy.

" Thank you, Mr. Malcolm," he said.

" Not at all," said Mr. Malcolm punctiliously, " I'm sure you need a good one. And, when you have finished, I don't think we require you any more to-night. You will certify the cause of death, and you'll be at the disposal of the police to give your evidence to-morrow ? "

" Of course."

" Very well, then. Mr. Dakers knows your address, doesn't he ? "

" He does."

" Then we need delay you no longer."

The doctor hesitated.

" There's just one thing, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " Forgive my curiosity, but a moment ago you said that if it hadn't been for this suicide it might have meant the arrest of someone in the hotel for murder."

" I did," said Mr. Malcolm quietly. " Well ? "

" Do you mean by that that someone would have murdered this man—or had this man murdered someone ? "

There was a moment's silence and then Mr. Malcolm spoke quickly.

" I meant that had he not committed suicide it is very probable that someone would have taken his life."

Varney looked at Mr. Malcolm in surprise. At their face value the words were truthful enough : for, in any case, the man's life had been forfeit to the State, but according to the doctor's question Mr. Malcolm had replied with a direct lie. Varney was puzzled : he could not see the necessity for such secrecy.

" Thank you, sir."

The doctor drained his glass. Then, with a little bow he turned on his heel and left the room. Mr. Malcolm turned to the manager.

" Mr. Dakers," he said, " as soon as we are ready I will let you know, and then you and Inspector Varney between you can make arrangements for the removal of the body. In the meantime I should like a word or two with Miss Gaynor and Mr. Noel Venn. Would you ask them to come immediately to my room ? "

For a moment the manager looked at Mr. Malcolm, apparently rather puzzled, and then he thought better of asking any question and with a nod and a mumbled word he turned and left somewhat hurriedly.

Mr. Malcolm turned to Inspector Varney.

" Varney," he said. " This is a somewhat serious matter. In a few moments we will go through the papers of the man who called himself Dickson, but I want you first to hear exactly what I am going to say both to the girl who saw the body of the murdered man—not him in the room there—and secondly, to a young friend of mine who is a newspaper reporter and to whom I made a promise . . . that promise must be fulfilled."

Varney nodded. He knew Mr. Malcolm in this mood : he knew that Mr. Malcolm would tell him just what he wanted to and no more, and he knew, therefore, that it was quite useless to put any questions . . . but the Inspector was puzzled by the other's attitude. The man whom he had grown to admire and respect so highly was very serious, and to Varney it seemed that there was no reason for this solemnity. After all, Mr. Malcolm had discovered a murder : Mr. Malcolm had discovered the murderer, and that murderer had merely anticipated the executioner. What more satisfactory to Mr. Malcolm? He would be troubled no more.

But Varney was not allowed to pursue his thoughts any further, for there came a knock at the door and then entered one of the most attractive young ladies that Varney had ever been privileged to see. He rose to his feet instantly, but the girl had no eyes for him. She walked straight over to Mr. Malcolm, who stood before the empty grate, and Varney noticed that a young man of pleasing aspect had entered the room behind her and was closing the door.

" Marilyn," said Mr. Malcolm, " I want you, my dear, just to be very steady for a few moments. Sit down."

" What's the matter, Mr. Malcolm ? " asked Marilyn.

" I want you to know from me to-night," said Mr. Malcolm, " because I think it's far better so than that you should see it in the papers to-morrow morning . . . that you did really see the body of a murdered man this afternoon in the lift."

Varney, watching the girl closely, saw the colour drain slowly from her cheeks, a strained, frightened look creep into her eyes : it was almost as though these words had brought back to her a vivid remembrance of the terrible sight she had seen that afternoon, the sight which had so greatly unnerved her. She stared at Mr. Malcolm anxiously, eager to hear his news, yet fearful of its import.

But Mr. Malcolm was quick to explain and thus curtail her suspense.

" A man was murdered in the hotel this afternoon, Marilyn . . . probably only a few moments before you saw his dead body. He was removed, I must say, most ingeniously, but fortunately I got a line on to the man who had killed him, and as so often happens, no good has come to the man who hoped to profit. He has killed himself this evening."

" What ? "

It was the voice of the young man, who was still standing by the door.

" I'll tell you all about it in a minute," said Mr. Malcolm, " when Marilyn has gone. There's no need for her to be bothered with the details, but I just wanted to tell you of this, Marilyn, so that you shouldn't wake up to-morrow morning and read it in your *Echo* . . . for, of course, you read the *Echo*, don't you ? "

He was smiling and Varney noticed that the girl was smiling also and that colour was returning to her cheeks : obviously the first shock was over, and although Varney could not understand the significance which lay behind his mention of a well-known newspaper, he realized that Mr. Malcolm's treatment was being successful.

"The *Echo* doesn't always tell the truth," said Mr. Malcolm, "but on this occasion it is going to. I promised Venn that I would let him know the story as soon as I was at liberty to do so. I am going to do so now, and he's going to get the scoop. So until to-morrow, my dear, you must be patient. Run downstairs now and enjoy yourself. I shall have to detain Venn for a little, but no doubt when he has done his work he will return and claim you for the ballroom floor. And thank you, Marilyn, thank you very much for having helped me."

"Me?" said the girl. "But I didn't help you at all, Mr. Malcolm. I only wish I could have done."

"You helped me very considerably, Marilyn," said Mr. Malcolm, "although you didn't know it. Run along, there's a dear, and soon I'll come down and entertain you."

The girl laughed.

"Don't you bother, Mr. Malcolm, I'm perfectly happy."

She rose to her feet.

"Thank you for telling me," she said.

Mr. Malcolm smiled, advanced quickly to the door and opened it: he held it for her while she passed through. Mr. Malcolm closed it again behind her and turned to the young man.

"Venn," he said, "this is Inspector Varney of the Edinburgh Criminal Investigation Department—a nice man! You will like him."

He turned to Varney.

"This is Noel Venn, the star reporter of the *Echo*. A nice man—you will like him."

Varney and Venn smiled at each other. Indeed Venn liked the appearance of this spruce Detective Inspector, and Varney was attracted by the frank expression on the other's face.

"I promised a little time ago," said Mr. Malcolm, "that I would let you know the full details. Here they are. To-morrow morning they will be public property, but your paper will be the only one that can give it to the public—so I have kept my promise."

"Indeed you have," said Noel Venn enthusiastically. "Thank you very much, Mr. Malcolm."

"Not at all," said Mr. Malcolm punctiliously. "I always keep my promises: that is nothing to thank me for."

He smiled at the confused expression on the young man's face.

"Now listen," he said. "We have established that a man calling himself Dickson was killed in this hotel . . ."

"In this hotel?" said Varney, looking up.

"Yes," said Mr. Malcolm shortly. "He was killed in a room which at present contains the dead body of his murderer."

"Good lord!" said Varney, quite unable to restrain the words. " How on earth do you know that, Mr. Malcolm ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" I know it," he said, " because of a green sequin which I found in the rug which should properly belong to a double-bedded room. That rug was in a single room and had obviously been removed from its proper place. The lady who owns the double-bedded room—sharing it with her husband—wears a dress from which this green sequin must have fallen. The man who called himself Dickson, and who has now committed suicide, didn't know these two people. It is evident, therefore, that he killed his namesake and that he packed him in his victim's own trunk and rather ingeniously had him sent off to Edinburgh. Had I not had a piece of luck, this would have given him several days' start on those investigating the crime . . . after this had been discovered. But he made a mistake . . . several mistakes, in fact. In the first place he went to Edinburgh to wire for the trunk in the name of Dickson, but he chose for this occasion a time when there was being played upon the golf course outside here "—Mr. Malcolm made a motion towards the window with his hand—" probably the greatest golf match of all time. There were certain outstanding features and facts of this match with which he failed to make himself acquainted. It was a pity, because, although he professed to have watched every stroke of it—that was his alibi—he didn't know enough about the match to carry it off. This made me suspicious, together with certain other facts, and I began to investigate—hence the discovery of the body in that trunk in Edinburgh this evening and the presence here of Inspector Varney with a warrant for murder.

" Now I want you to understand, Venn, that personalities are to be kept out of this. I mean by that, that I am not to be mentioned. When you refer to any of my actions or to any of the actions of Inspector Varney you are merely to say that the police did this or that. That is clearly understood, isn't it ? "

" Certainly," said Venn. " I understand."

" Between you and me," said Mr. Malcolm, " we had some little doubt whether we had enough evidence to warrant an arrest or not, but in our own minds there was no doubt of the true facts. However, we were going to risk it, and then we were informed that the man had committed suicide."

" Do you mean that Dickson had shot himself ? "

" No," said Mr. Malcolm. " Why is it that everyone immediately jumps to the conclusion that a suicide has shot himself ? He took an overdose of a sleeping-draught. We don't know his identity. That is all that I can tell you, Venn, but it's a nice story to begin with."

" My dear sir, it certainly is. It's a real scoop for the paper."

" And for Noel Venn, I hope," said Mr. Malcolm, with a smile. " All right, my lad, away you go and write it up."

Venn paused for a moment at the door.

" Would you like to read the copy ? " he asked.

Mr. Malcolm looked at him in surprise.

" Good gracious ! " he said, " this is the first time that the Press has ever offered me such facilities. No," he smiled. " I'm sure you'll do it excellently. No need for me to correct your grammar."

He laughed.

" But that's not what I meant," cried Venn.

" I know," said Mr. Malcolm. " I know, but I shan't have time for it."

With a grateful glance towards him and a quick cheerful nod to the Inspector, the youth opened the door and closed it quickly behind him.

" Now," said Mr. Malcolm, " now, Inspector Varney, shall we get on with the case ? "

CHAPTER XVIII

A Conference is Held

IF Mr. Malcolm had really thought that he was going to descend to the lounge and entertain Marilyn that evening—a suggestion which he had made to her—he was unduly optimistic. But perhaps his words had been prompted by a desire that the girl should be frightened no more than was necessary, and that he should give away no more of his own ideas in front of Noel Venn—and therefore the great British public—than was absolutely essential. However that may be, it was several hours later, in fact nearly three o'clock in the morning, when Inspector Varney and Inspector Baird came with him to his room and sat down to a conference.

Mr. Malcolm, aided by the manager of the hotel, had taken the precaution of having some sandwiches and beer ready for them in his room, and as they entered, Mr. Malcolm took the napkin from the table which had been laid and showed them the supper which was waiting.

" By Jove ! Mr. Malcolm," remarked Inspector Varney. " You certainly do think of everything, don't you ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled, rather a pleased smile.

" My dear Inspector," he said quietly, " surely you realize by now, after all the work that we have done together, that I dislike any activity, especially official activity, without all possible comfort."

He signed to his guests that they should sit down on each side of the table, and he took the place at the head of it.

" A little sustenance first, I think," he said, " and then we will discuss all that we know."

The two inspectors required no second bidding, but were soon hard at work on the sandwiches and the beer, and Mr. Malcolm, although he himself partook very frugally, watched them with interested eyes. It was not long before they had disposed of the provisions which the now rather frightened Mr. Dakers had supplied, had pushed back their chairs and lighted cigarettes. Mr. Malcolm puffed easily for a moment or two, deep in thought, then he looked up at Inspector Varney.

" Varney," he said, " are you quite satisfied ? "

The Inspector stared at him for a second before replying, and there was a somewhat surprised look upon his face.

" Let me think, just for a moment, Mr. Malcolm," he said.

" Certainly," said Mr. Malcolm. " I can't stop you—but don't be long because I rather want to get to bed, and we've got a good deal to discuss."

The Inspector laughed.

" Well, I can think aloud as well as in any other way," he said. " I was thinking that there's no doubt, Mr. Malcolm, that you have found the murderer of the man Dickson. The only thing which we have got to discover is the motive and his real identity. After all, I don't think that should be difficult."

" You don't think there is any doubt, then," said Mr. Malcolm, quietly, " that the man in room thirty-seven . . . the man who called himself ' Dickson ' but whose name we have got to discover . . . killed the man whose body you found in the trunk ? "

" Well," Inspector Varney smiled, " if he didn't, how are you going to get out of your own facts ? As I understand it, Mr. Malcolm, you refused to believe that Miss Gaynor had seen anything but what she said she had seen in the lift. Having met the young lady I am in entire agreement with you. Acting on that supposition you found out all that you could. You discovered that the man who called himself Dickson had, in a sense, usurped the room which was being retained for a stranger of the same name : you discovered that the man Dickson on arriving at this hotel and realizing that his room was already occupied, had apparently taken fright and disappeared immediately to Edinburgh without making much of a fuss. That struck you as being . . ."

" Suspicious ? " murmured Mr. Malcolm.

" Yes, that's the word I want—suspicious. But it didn't strike you in this way until when going down from your room to have a cocktail in the lounge with your friends, the man Dickson came hurtling down the stairs and said ' Good God ! who the hell did that ? ' in spite of suffering very severe pain from his ankle owing to the damage he had done to himself in the fall. You then went to see Dickson—or, rather, the man who called himself ' Dickson ' . . . this is very confusing, isn't it ? "

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, with a smile, " but less confusing than calling him Mr. A. Let's continue to describe him as you are describing him."

" Very well," replied the Inspector, with a smile. " And you discovered when you saw him, that his alibi for the afternoon—his movements of the afternoon being of interest to you—was not watertight. He was supposed to have been out on the links watching the match—the big match—but quite definitely he knew nothing about what had happened."

" He knew something," said Mr. Malcolm quickly. " He knew just about as much as I would expect a man to know who had made enquiries . . ."

" But had not been there," put in the Inspector at once.

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm. " Exactly . . . but had not been there."

" That increased your interest in the man," continued Varney, " particularly when you discovered on the mat in his room a green sequin . . ."

" It's extraordinary," said Mr. Malcolm, interrupting the Inspector, " how these little things do count. Who would have thought, for instance, that a sequin would have dropped from a green dress on to a mat by a fireplace ? Far more likely, surely, that it should drop—if it were to drop, at all—on the floor in front of the long mirror which is supplied in every double room. I think, Inspector, that we have to thank the cold spell of last night for the fact that Mrs. Thurloe probably donned her dress for dinner in front of the fire."

" Murder will out," said the Inspector. " That's not very original, but it's damn true. Especially when you are anywhere about, Mr. Malcolm."

Mr. Malcolm bowed.

" Have some more beer, Inspector," he remarked.

The Inspector smiled.

" I don't mind if I do, Mr. Malcolm. After all, all this talking is not natural to me. Where was I ? "

Mr. Malcolm provided the beverage and sat down again.

" You were just saying, Inspector, that a green sequin was found on a mat in his room."

" Ah, yes. This sequin," continued the Inspector, " immediately brought to your mind an evening dress which you had seen Mrs. Thurloe wear on the previous night. You were astonished at its presence in that room, for you had no knowledge of Mrs. Thurloe and the man who called himself ' Dickson ' being acquainted. You put this to the test and discovered that Mrs. Thurloe and the man did not know each other. You then persuaded the manager of the hotel to go with you to Mrs. Thurloe's room, where you discovered a mat with a stain."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " not only that, Inspector, but a mat which did not belong to the room . . . a mat in a double-bedded room which was of the size which should have been in a single-bedded room."

" I beg your pardon," said the Inspector, " I had forgotten that bit . . . yes. You removed this mat and had it replaced by another : you took that mat to the laboratories of the University, and there, with the aid of one of their professors, you discovered that the stain on this mat was blood . . . fresh blood . . . blood, shall we say, recently spilt."

" We will say it if you like," said Mr. Malcolm, " but it sounds gruesome to me ! Sorry ! Go on."

Again the Inspector smiled. He knew his Mr. Malcolm and his little jokes.

" The obvious inference was that this mat had been removed from the room of the man who called himself ‘ Dickson ’ and replaced by a mat originally in that of Mrs. Thurloe. This was a sound idea from any murderer’s point of view, for the stain would be unlikely to be noticed in the other room, whereas should any suspicion eventually fall upon the murderer, no trace of blood could be discovered in his own room. So your assumption was that the murderer of the man Dickson had removed the rug, and had replaced it by that which he found in Mrs. Thurloe’s room ? ”

“ Quite,” said Mr. Malcolm.

“ On the strength of that,” continued the Inspector, “ we were quite rightly going to arrest this man, and just as we were about to do so we were told that he had committed suicide.”

The Inspector stopped and looked at Mr. Malcolm. Mr. Malcolm continued to smile. The Inspector paused : he did not quite know how to proceed. Mr. Malcolm helped him.

“ A very clear statement of the case up to the point of the suicide,” he said. “ Will you now continue, please, Inspector Baird, and inform us of all that happened in that room.”

Inspector Baird looked at Mr. Malcolm.

“ But you know it all, sir,” he remarked.

“ I know,” said Mr. Malcolm, “ but it is a very good thing to hear all this again. In a conference of this sort we must go over all the ground and make quite sure we are right as we go along. What did we discover in that room ? "

Inspector Baird thought for a moment and then he looked at Mr. Malcolm : he had evidently marshalled his thoughts.

" Nothing, really," he said.

" On the contrary," said Mr. Malcolm gently, " I think we discovered a great deal. But go on, Inspector, go on."

Inspector Varney looked across at his subordinate.

" Tell Mr. Malcolm exactly what happened," he said severely.

Inspector Baird continued at once : his superior officer's tone had contained an order.

" At your direction, Mr. Malcolm," he said, " we looked at the finger-prints in every portion of the room. We discovered on the glass from which the sleeping-draught had been taken, and on the bottle which contained what was left of it, only the finger-prints of the dead man. In the remainder of the room there were the finger-prints presumably made by the maid and also on the polished surface of the desk certain finger-prints made by someone yet to be identified."

" Quite right," said Mr. Malcolm gently, " quite right . . . and then ? "

" Apart from that," said Inspector Baird, " I don't think we discovered anything. We searched his desk and looked through all his papers but there was nothing to go to prove that the man who committed suicide was not called ' Dickson,' or to suggest that he was anything but what he was supposed to be—a visitor to St. Andrews, perhaps to watch the Championship."

" Quite right," said Mr. Malcolm again, " quite right. But, Inspector, there was also nothing to prove that he actually was all that he said he was . . . all that he suggested he was."

Both inspectors looked puzzled.

" What do you mean ? " asked Inspector Varney.

" Well," said Mr. Malcolm, " he may well have been exactly what Inspector Baird has suggested. There was nothing to prove that he wasn't, but on the other hand he may well not have been. I mean that there were no letters addressed to him by the name of Dickson . . . there were no letters at all . . . there was nothing which the normal man carries about on him and by which he can so often be identified. It looks almost as though this man called Dickson had no wish to be identified should anything happen to him."

" No," said Inspector Varney. " No . . . that's true. I quite overlooked that."

" There is another point," said Mr. Malcolm, " another point which interests me strangely . . . but . . . er . . ."

Mr. Malcolm was thinking, but he never took long to make up his mind. He turned quickly to Inspector Varney.

" Inspector," he said, " tell me—are you satisfied that a murder was committed here this afternoon ? "

" Perfectly," said the Inspector.

" Are you satisfied that it was committed in the manner which I have suggested ? "

" Perfectly," replied the Inspector again.

" And are you satisfied," asked Mr. Malcolm for the third time, " that the murderer is lying upstairs dead because he has taken his own life ? "

" I don't think," said the Inspector, weighing his words carefully, " that there can be any doubt about it."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm.

He paused again. Once more Mr. Malcolm was deep in thought, but once more it did not take him long to make up his mind.

" The papers—or, rather, the *Echo,* closely followed by the others—will to-morrow morning give just that version of the case. In order to carry out the illusion that that is the official view "—Mr. Malcolm paused just long enough to glance at both inspectors and to notice the startled expression on their faces—" I think you had better return to Edinburgh to-night. But, Inspector Varney, you must be at the end of the telephone all day to-morrow. The inquest, of course, will have to take place here and you will be required. But I think you had better continue exactly as you have started : in other words, on the assumption that the case is over."

Inspector Varney could contain himself no longer.

" But surely, Mr. Malcolm," he said, " the case is over. We've discovered a murder . . . when I say ' we ' please understand that I quite realize the credit is entirely yours—and we have discovered the murderer, who has saved the taxpayer the trouble of paying an executioner. That is all, isn't it ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled, but his smile was mischievous.

" That, I take it, then," he said, " is the official view of the police ? "

" But of course it is," said Inspector Varney.

" In that case," said Mr. Malcolm, " I am completely satisfied. Once again I have a chance of proving the police to be wrong ! "

Inspector Baird looked dubiously at his superior officer, but the latter was staring at Mr. Malcolm.

" But surely," he said, " surely . . ."

" Surely," prompted Mr. Malcolm, " that is what I believe too ? "

" But you have suggested it to us all along," remarked the Inspector. " It is upon your idea—not that I haven't agreed with it, of course—that I have decided. But . . ."

" But," said Mr. Malcolm, " I only *suggested* it to you and I cannot quite understand one or two aspects of the case. I shall want you I think, Inspector Varney, I shall want you, where I can get at you. I think there is a great deal more in this case than meets the eye."

CHAPTER XIX

Constable Mackintosh forgets his New Suit

CONSTABLE MACKINTOSH looked down at his new suit with a feeling of pride. Several years had elapsed since he had indulged in the luxury of a visit to the St. Andrews tailoring store, but as those years had been spent almost entirely in uniform this was scarcely surprising. Lately, however, Constable Mackintosh had been entrusted with certain confidential operations which required the use of a civilian suit, and when the first of these had been assigned to him he had hied himself to the tailor and was now wearing the tangible result of this visit.

Constable Mackintosh felt himself to be extremely smart ; to be clothed entirely in keeping with the surroundings in which he found himself. Actually at that moment Constable Mackintosh was standing at one end of a corridor on the first floor of that most luxurious hotel, the Supreme. The time was well after midnight and the constable felt a little disappointed that the many smart people whom he had frequently seen entering and leaving by the portals of the hotel, were not about in order to admire him. However, the job with which he had been charged was likely to last him well into the following morning, and he looked forward with gleeful anticipation to the admiring glances of the housemaids as they arrived to do their early-morning work.

The constable turned and started to pace the corridor very quietly. He had been instructed to be very quiet when placed at the door of number thirty-seven, a door which was locked and which led to a room containing, as he well knew, the body of a dead man. His instructions were that the body would be removed in the early hours of the morning before the guests of the hotel were awake, but that he would still be required to remain on guard in order to make quite sure that no one should interfere with the room itself, even after it was rid of its grim occupant. The constable reached a position opposite the door and leaning against the wall practised an attitude which he thought suitably displayed the excellent cut of his new suit. As he did so a door further along the corridor opened, and through it came two figures. The constable recognized them at once and he quickly assumed a more ceremonious position : although he was personally unacquainted with Inspector Varney, he knew him well by repute, and the few words which he had had with Inspector Baird had imbued in him a spirit of respectful admiration.

The two inspectors passed him with a curt nod and a whispered " Good night " and descended the stairs out of his sight. The constable relaxed and once again leant against the wall. How wonderful, he thought, to rise to such dizzy heights in the profession. But Constable Mackintosh was ambitious—a quality which goes with some slight vanity and which excuses it—and it occurred to him for a moment that in a few years he also might be transferred to Edinburgh on the Criminal Investigation side. Here he was, within three weeks of leaving the uniformed branch, already mixed up in what promised to be a first-rate murder case, with the great Mr. Malcolm himself at the head of affairs. Who was there greater in all Scotland, after all, than Mr. Malcolm ? Who else was there from whom Inspector Varney was actually pleased to take orders ? And if the case had interested Mr. Malcolm, then surely it was one that was exceptional in its merits and difficulties. Constable Mackintosh almost preened himself with glee. If he could carry out his duties well, if only he could have just one chance, one streak of luck, perhaps he would impress himself upon Inspector Varney and thereby accelerate his promotion.

These pleasant thoughts kept Constable Mackintosh from feeling sleepy. True, he had spent most of the day out on the course watching the progress of those aspiring to Championship honours, and, no mean golfer himself, he had enjoyed his day enormously : true, he had expected a quiet evening in his landlady's house, perhaps with a book by the fire : true, he had been annoyed on receiving an urgent summons from the police station and on realizing, when he was given his orders, that he was to do duty all the night. But now Constable Mackintosh would have exchanged his position with no man in the Force. He was proud ; proud of himself, proud of his sudden eminence and importance, and proud of his new suit.

It has been said that pride goes before a fall. Constable Mackintosh suffered no fall. But something happened at that moment, just as his glance fell to the immaculate creases in his trousers, just as his thoughts dwelt on their probable effect on the first chambermaid to appear in that corridor when dawn had broken. Constable Mackintosh was standing now directly opposite the door of number thirty-seven. Constable Mackintosh knew very well that the room was locked. He knew also that within that room, behind windows which had been carefully shut so that no ingress could be made without attracting his attention, lay the dead body of a man, a man who, rumour said, had died by his own hand . . . and yet from that room there came the sudden wild shriek of a man in mortal fear.

Constable Mackintosh had been through the war : Constable Mackintosh had heard men cry aloud in pain, in fear, in all possible emotion, but Constable Mackintosh, standing there frozen stiff with horror, his hair seemingly on end on his head, his limbs paralysed with the suddenness and violence of the shock, told his bemused brain that never in his life had he heard anything quite so fearsome, quite so terrible. Constable Mackintosh stood as though transfixed, all the colour flown from his face, all the sleek satisfaction vanished from his attitude.

CHAPTER XX

Mr. Malcolm loses some Sleep

MR. MALCOLM had one foot already in bed when the startling sound of a man's shriek of fear broke the silence of the night. Just for one minute Mr. Malcolm found himself paralysed—the shock was so sudden that it had taken him completely unawares—but for one second only, for Mr. Malcolm was quick to move in any emergency. He did not pause even to place his slippers on his feet or to don a dressing-gown, but just as he was—a vision in pink silk—he shot to the door of his room and out into the corridor.

Mr. Malcolm's eyes fell first upon the spectacle of a young man in a brown lounge suit standing in an attitude of panic and staring with goggling eyes at the door of the room immediately opposite to him. Mr. Malcolm knew that that door was numbered thirty-seven and he knew what lay beyond. Mr. Malcolm also knew the identity of Constable Mackintosh, and it took him but a further second to be standing beside the petrified young man.

" Did you scream, Constable ? " he asked.

Mr. Malcolm's voice was tuned low, but there was something commanding about it, a quality which demanded instant attention, and Constable Mackintosh found himself jerked out of his moment of terror back to reality with a sharp thud.

" No, sir."

" Who did then ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Someone," said the Constable, collecting his scattered wits as rapidly as he could, " someone inside that room."

" Very well, then," said Mr. Malcolm, " let's investigate."

But even as he spoke the words he was not wasting time, for he had turned on his heel and had darted back to his own room. In a moment he appeared once more, this time with a key in his hand.

Mr. Malcolm unlocked the door of number thirty-seven and with a quick gesture threw it open.

All was in darkness, but he was at once conscious of a cold draught. Now Mr. Malcolm knew that the windows had been shut and that there could be no reason for this draught unless one of them were open, yet he did not hesitate. Finding the switch with his fingers he abruptly turned on the electric light. Constable Mackintosh, whose panic had now changed to a violent excitement at the thought that he was actually working with the great Mr. Malcolm himself and that, perhaps, here was that very chance for which he had so recently been hoping, found his eyes first turn towards the bed. On it lay the still form of the man who had died that evening: there could be no question that he certainly had not emitted that shriek. Constable Mackintosh allowed his eyes to rove quickly around the room and one thing became immediately apparent. One of the windows was wide open, and from this window a pane of glass had been skilfully removed. It was quite obvious that some stranger had gained entrance into that room and it was also quite obvious by what method he had achieved his purpose. Mr. Malcolm was already at the window, and the constable watched him lean out cautiously and stare around the verandah beyond. For a few seconds he stood there, throwing quick glances in every direction, and then, carefully as he had poked it out, he withdrew his head back again into the room.

Constable Mackintosh looked at Mr. Malcolm and found that the eyes of his superior were on him and that an amused smile was playing about his mouth.

"Well," said Mr. Malcolm, "what do you make of it?"

Constable Mackintosh involuntarily cleared his throat before replying.

"Well, sir," he said, "it looks like as if someone had forced an entry into this room."

"Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, "so far we agree. And then?"

"Then," replied the constable, "he began nosing about the room, probably with a torch."

" Oh," said Mr. Malcolm, " . . . now why with a torch ? "

" Because, sir," replied the constable, rather pleased with himself, " he couldn't have turned the light on or he would have seen . . . *that* "—he jerked his head towards the bed—" that—at once."

" And how do you know," said Mr. Malcolm, " that he didn't see that at once ? "

" Because then, sir,"—the constable was now distinctly pleased with himself—" he would have screamed straight away."

Mr. Malcolm paused. Mr. Malcolm looked thoughtful.

" How can we tell," he said, " that he didn't scream straight away ? "

" The way I look at it, sir," said the constable, warming to his job, " is that a burglar came here not knowing what was in the room, had a look round to see what he could find . . . the rays of his torch suddenly fell on *that*, and naturally frightened him nearly out of his life. He screamed and cleared out."

" And the way that you look at it," said Mr. Malcolm, " is probably quite right. However . . . a little further investigation is, I think, advisable."

Before carrying his words into action, Mr. Malcolm turned to the door and re-entered the corridor. He looked around him, rather expecting to see the startled faces of certain of those occupying the rooms near by, and ready to produce some excuse to satisfy their curiosity and make them return to their rooms and resume their slumber. However, no such necessity arose, for no door was opened and Mr. Malcolm was pleased to reflect that the air of St. Andrews was evidently of a sufficient quality to enable those in sleep to remain undisturbed by what had been a most disquietening noise.

Mr. Malcolm turned once more into the room and closed the door gently behind him. He then moved quickly to the window and began a careful examination. Outside, edging the small verandah, was a long window-box which stretched the entire length of the window, and his first glance at this yielded him one clue, for in the soil of the box could be clearly discerned the imprint of a foot. This imprint had evidently been made by the intruder on his hurried exit after emitting that involuntary advertisement of his presence in the room, for the toe was pointing away from the window. His method of ingress also was easy to discover, for the pane of glass had been most skilfully removed and the entrance obviously one effected by an expert.

Mr. Malcolm smiled to himself. At the first moment of hearing that shriek he had been disturbed, very disturbed, for the whole case as he saw it had a sufficiency of difficult features as it was, without further additions. But now it seemed possible to assume that Constable Mackintosh, whom Mr. Malcolm was pleased to note seemed to be an intelligent young man, even though slightly inclined to panic at the unexpected, had probably been correct in his reconstruction of what had occurred in that room. For a moment Mr. Malcolm allowed his thoughts to wander to the feelings of the unfortunate constable when from a room containing a dead man there had come that startling shriek, but for a moment only, for Mr. Malcolm had no wish to waste his time on what appeared to be a simple matter, and thus to lose that sleep of which he had been already deprived of so much that night.

" A pretty clear case, I think, Constable," he said, " but one which I am afraid will necessitate a somewhat unpleasant night for you."

" Yes, sir," said the constable promptly.

Mr. Malcolm smiled to himself.

" Instead of standing outside in the corridor, Constable, I am afraid you will have to stay in this room for just as long as it takes Inspector Varney to arrive here."

The constable looked surprised.

" Inspector Varney, sir ? "

" Yes, Inspector Varney," repeated Mr. Malcolm dryly. " I'm going to telephone him now to come along immediately, and as soon as he arrives I want you to give him a detailed account of all that we heard and have done in this room. I will instruct him to carry out a thorough examination and I shall expect you to help him in every way you can. All clear ? "

" Yes, sir. Perfectly clear, sir."

His approaching collaboration with Inspector Varney had endowed the constable, in his own opinion, with an added importance, and there was subdued excitement in his voice as he replied.

" Good," said Mr. Malcolm approvingly. " Well . . . until the Inspector comes I'm afraid I must leave you here. I don't know whether you have any superstitious feelings ? "

" No, sir," said the constable, at once, " no, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I was startled by that cry, but then . . ."

" Quite," said Mr. Malcolm, smiling, " but then ! . . . Good night, Constable."

" Good night, sir."

Mr. Malcolm returned to his own room. Mr. Malcolm moved straight across to the telephone ; he gave a number and then waited. From the other end of the wire a sleepy voice demanded his business but the sleepiness vanished miraculously as Mr. Malcolm gave his name and asked to be put through to Inspector Varney. A moment more he waited, and then, in a few curt sentences, he explained the purpose of his call and gave a short description of all that had happened in room number thirty-seven just a little while before. His message given, Mr. Malcolm was just about to ring off when a thought occurred to him.

" Oh, and Varney," he added, and there was a plaintive, almost a wistful note in his voice, " unless it's absolutely essential would you mind *not* disturbing me or letting me be disturbed until the morning? After all," he smiled, " it is imperative that man should sleep ! "

From the other end of the wire there came a muffled laugh and the Inspector's firm assurance.

With a sigh of thankfulness Mr. Malcolm returned the receiver to its hook and sat down on his bed. Wearily he rubbed his feet, which had become somewhat chilled by his bare wanderings. Circulation restored, Mr. Malcolm lay down in bed and pulled the clothes over him.

Mr. Malcolm closed his eyes. Mr. Malcolm felt slightly surprised that no less than three murders should be taking place at the foot of his bed. Mr. Malcolm made no attempt to interfere with these, for it occurred to him that they would be very much more easy to solve if he allowed everything to happen before his eyes; rather than be compelled to reconstruct events of which he had not been an eye-witness. Having been an interested observer of the third murder, it was with no sensation of surprise that Mr. Malcolm heard an insistent voice commanding that he ring the bell to order a taxi. It was with ready willingness that Mr. Malcolm rang the bell, but even as he did so he opened his eyes to find the sun streaming brightly into the room and the telephone bell ringing by his side.

CHAPTER XXI

Marilyn is Restless

AT about the same time as Mr. Malcolm, acting host to Inspectors Varney and Baird, was making that somewhat belated supper in his room—in fact, at about twenty minutes to three of that momentous morning —Marilyn Gaynor, who ever since midnight, at which hour she had retired to bed, had lain tossing beneath the sheets in a vain attempt to woo that sleep which so obdurately refused to close her eyelids, suddenly switched on the bed-lamp beside her pillows and sat bolt upright in bed.

Darkness had become distasteful to her, a further tax upon nerves that had been too sorely tried during the last few hours, and it was with a feeling of relief that, leaning back once more upon the pillows she stared around her wearily, noting the familiar contours of the room. Strange to think that beside the prosaic outlines of that wardrobe, only a moment before the darkness had envisaged to her tired, over-wrought mind the huddled-up shape of a man on whom death had come with tragic swiftness: strange to think that in the reflecting-glass of her dressing-mirror, in the darkness her eyes had so clearly discerned the features of him she had seen but lately in the lift. Strange that there should have been nothing, nothing save the turmoil in her brain to suggest such disturbing phantoms, and with a sigh of weariness Marilyn closed her eyes once more and prepared her mind for sleep. Perhaps now that the light fell reassuringly upon her eyelids, now that the fantastic possibilities of the shadows in her room could no longer menace the opening of her eyes, sleep might come at last to soothe her fluttering nerves.

For ten minutes she lay thus, ten minutes during which before the eyes of her tortured mind a hundred sheep had diligently performed that unprofitable leap over the self-same hedge, each sheep as it jumped turning at once into the semblance of that lifeless, hunched-up figure which refused to be dismissed.

At last Marilyn Gaynor gave up the unequal struggle. Perhaps had she been provided with some frivolous literature even now the situation might be saved, sleep might yet be wooed could she but have turned her heated imagination to work upon the creations of some author's fancy. But Marilyn had come unprovided for such an emergency, and the table by her side boasted no reading-matter save a few magazines she had already seen.

With a sigh she opened her eyes again and raised herself upon the pillows: wearily she stared at the tiny travelling-clock that ticked beside her. Both hands were now on the stroke of three, and a realization of the time decided the girl. There was nothing else for it. For three hours she had lain tossing in a fruitless pursuit of slumber. She would woo the jade no longer : a few sharp turns about the garden of the hotel would soon calm her fevered nerves and restore that sense of peacefulness which conduces rest. She had sought this remedy on many a previous occasion and it had never failed. Slipping from the bed and quickly donning her clothes Marilyn told herself repeatedly that this time also the fresh air must prove friendly.

Over her woolly jumper and skirt she drew on a heavy tweed coat, thrust a pair of neat shoes over her unstockinged feet and walking gently to the door of her room she opened it noiselessly, then paused a moment to switch off the light. She moved out somewhat timidly into the deserted corridor. Only one light was shining in the passage and this lay at the right end where the stairs led down to the floor beneath. Towards this rosy glimmer Marilyn made her way, tiptoeing gently over the narrow carpet in order that she, the sleepless, should not be guilty of arousing the more fortunate. Down the stairs she hastened swiftly and nodded to the night clerk who, rousing himself from his drowsy posture behind the desk, stared at her in a sleepy surprise.

" I can't sleep, so I'm going to get a little fresh air," the girl explained, with a smile.

Without pausing for his answer she moved straight across the empty lounge and pushing open the great front door, stepped out into the cool freshness of the garden. The night was a clear one although there was no moon, but the velvety blackness of the sky was studded with thousands of stars from which streamed light of that almost magical lambent quality so often to be seen in Scotland. The thudding of waves upon the pebbles of the shore made a rhythmical murmur in the air which was itself a solace to tired nerves, a musical accompaniment to the beauty of the night, and as she moved gently about the green lawns of the garden, peace came dropping slowly but surely into the tired mind of Marilyn Gaynor. Noiselessly she moved across the tennis lawn, along the tiny path that edged the lily pond, pausing a moment to stare down at the masses of green leaves that floated upon it, and as she paced quietly along, the doings of the last few hours began to assume their right perspective. She saw things now as they had actually occurred, not with the added intangible horror of nightmare fancy, but with that calm detachment which the light of morning so often transmutes to a happening that the night before has seemed disastrous. Her nerves relaxed, her steps became slower, and . . . she yawned, a yawn which presaged sleep.

As she yawned Marilyn shivered. Through the wool and tweed of her garments the night air struck chill, and with quickened steps she turned back towards the entrance of the hotel.

Even as she did so—even as, clasping her coat closer around her, she swung round on her heel and took one step backwards towards the hotel—a sudden sound glued her to the spot, and it was as though an icy hand clutched at her heart. For from the building before her there had come a shriek, grim and fearsome, pregnant with the most frightful possibilities, in view of the previous happenings in that place. And then, even as she heard the cry, Marilyn, who was now at the back of the hotel, saw a black figure leap into view from one of the windows upon the first floor, clamber over the verandah, leap from that on to the verandah of the window next to it, and thence to the fire-escape, down which it ran with lightning swiftness. The escape wound round to the other side of the building, and in a second the figure had disappeared from her sight.

But in that second Marilyn Gaynor acted. Although so recently a prey to nerves, the girl was no coward. The person who had made so furtive an exit from the Supreme could be none other than a burglar . . . and with this realization Marilyn was quick to follow. Running swiftly round to the front of the hotel she was just in time to catch sight of a flying figure leaping the gate that led into the road. At once the girl was after it ; through the gate she raced and down the road, in her mind no clear idea as to what she should do were her pursuit successful, but careful in spite of haste to keep to the shadows. All she knew was that she must keep the man in sight : for that it was a man who raced ahead it had needed only that flying leap over the gate to make apparent. No woman could have achieved the feat.

Thanks to the clearness of the night the girl had small difficulty in keeping the racing form in view. A straight stretch of road lay ahead, leading to that cluster of tiny stone houses which was the village, and as she ran Marilyn peered eagerly into the distance, hoping that out of some side-road there might emerge the welcome presence of some officer of the law. A forlorn hope, however, for even though the Hotel Supreme now lay far behind and the grey stone houses were all around her, yet the eyes of Marilyn Gaynor were gladdened by no vision of a stalwart policeman hastening to her aid.

Her breath came fast, her pace gradually lessened and the distance between herself and the man she was pursuing widened with every moment. He was but a black spot now merged in the shadows ahead . . . and as she raced up a street and around a corner Marilyn realized, with sinking heart, that her pursuit had been in vain . . . her quarry had escaped.

The road in which she now found herself was one of small residential villas, each surrounded by its own garden and thus completely detached from its neighbours on either side. It was a long road, too long for anyone, even the nimble figure she was following, to have been able to cover its entire length in the short space of time wherein Marilyn had lost sight of it, and as she stared disconsolately about she could see no deeper shadow in the obscurity ahead to dispel her disappointment. Baffled, she stood stock-still, hesitating as to her next move. Where the man had vanished to she had no idea ; any garden of the shuttered houses about her might easily afford him shelter. She stared before her dejectedly and the bright shining of a brass plate on a house immediately before her caught her eye. Automatically, almost unknowingly, she read the inscription that it bore, and even as she did so a sudden noise set the blood racing in her veins, her pulse leaping with renewed excitement. For as the letters DR. MANNERING formed some definite meaning in her mind, her eyes had noted another thing, a thing which, unimportant at first, became charged with a special significance when coupled with a sudden metallic creak which sounded with startling clearness at that moment in the silence of the street. The gate at which she was looking swayed gently on its hinges, and from those hinges there had come that betraying creak. Someone had passed through that gate but a moment or so before, for there was now no wind which might have caused such movement.

On the instant Marilyn stepped forward. In her mind there was but one idea, one purpose, which lay foremost. She must warn the doctor, warn him that crouched somewhere within his garden was hidden a man she had but lately seen clambering from a first-floor window in the Hòtel Supreme, a man whose aim, she did not doubt, had been to burgle. Without a moment's hesitation the girl stepped forward . . . and then she stood stock-still in complete amazement, an amazement which merged at once into aghast consternation.

For no shutters had been drawn before the windows of the house at which she gazed, and even as she had taken that quick step forward a light had sprung to life within the room. Silhouetted against the window, in the act of pulling down its blind, she could see the neat figure and gaunt features of Dr. Mannering. For a second she saw him, clearly limned against the light . . . and then the blind was drawn between them.

Several moments passed while Marilyn stood motionless, her mind alive with a thousand conjectures, her brain seething with surmises, and then out of the chaos of her thoughts emerged one definite conclusion, something upon which she could act at once. Obviously her only course was now to return to the hotel and lay all the facts before Mr. Malcolm. It had been from a room upon the first floor that she had seen the man escape: Mr. Malcolm's room lay also on that floor. He, therefore, was, without doubt, the best person to whom she could relate the events of the past few minutes.

Her mind made up, she cast one last glance at the house before her, at that shining brass plate, at the gate swinging creakily on its hinges, and then she turned quickly on her heel and took one step forward.

Marilyn Gaynor only took that one step forward, however, for even as she did so, a hand came out of the darkness behind and grasped her roughly by the arm.

Before she could make any attempt at resistance she felt herself drawn forcibly backwards into the shadows of some bushy shrubs that edged the garden. The suddenness of it all had taken her completely by surprise, but now she began to struggle furiously, exerting all her strength to be relieved of the arm that gripped her.

And then a strange thing happened.

"Look out! I think he's watching," came a whisper from the man who held her.

At once Marilyn ceased to struggle: indignation and fear fled from her, and in their place an incredulous wonder filled her mind.

For the voice had been that of Noel Venn; it was the young man's hand that grasped her by the arm, they were his fingers which now sought and clasped her own.

" Why . . . good heavens, Noel, what on earth are you doing here? How dare you frighten me like that ? "

The tone of mock reproof, apparent even in her whisper, quite failed to conceal, however, the very real relief and gladness she felt at his presence. She had been badly frightened, more frightened, indeed, than the girl would ever have cared to admit, by the suddenness of that unexpected grip.

" Awfully sorry, darling, but there wasn't any other way to stop you."

" But how did you get here ? . . . why aren't you asleep at the hotel ? "

Noel Venn smiled: there was a cool effrontery about the last question which he found amusing.

" If it comes to that, Marilyn, why aren't *you* ? "

" Oh, I couldn't sleep," she explained immediately.

Noel Venn nodded.

" I guessed that you couldn't when I saw you in the garden."

" In the garden ? "

" Yes . . . at the hotel. I couldn't sleep, either . . . so I was getting on with some writing I had to do. I sat by the window and when you came into the garden I saw you having a nocturnal stroll and thought I would join you. When I got down I thought you must have suddenly gone mad, for you were charging along the drive at a terrific rate, giving an excellent impersonation of a hound on the scent. I ran after you and saw you were following a man, so I tagged on to the end of the little procession. I tell you, Marilyn," he laughed gently, " St. Andrews has been seeing life to-night ! "

Marilyn smiled : underneath all that Noel Venn said there ran an undercurrent of gaiety that imbued his conversation with a tonic quality which was most inspiriting.

" But why didn't you let me know you were there ? " she whispered quickly.

The young man gave a stifled laugh.

" Frankly I was much too interested in the whole affair. I thought it better to remain an onlooker . . . you know, they always see the most ! "

" But I might have been in danger," she protested at once, and her tone was a shade reproachful.

" Might have been ? You were . . . or rather, you *are*. It's a very good thing for you, young woman, that I didn't join up with you."

" But why ? What d'you mean ? "

Marilyn stared up with a puzzled frown in her eyes at the vague outlines of the shadowy face above her. At once she felt his fingers press her hand as though to reassure her.

" My dear," he said, and this time there was no hint of laughter in his voice, " the man knows you followed him. He saw you when he pulled down that blind. While you stood there just now he was watching you from an upstairs window."

" *Oh !* "

Involuntarily Marilyn gasped : the thought was most unpleasant.

" It's a good thing I came along," went on Noel very gravely. " Perhaps if you'd started to walk back to the hotel he mightn't have let you."

" Mightn't have let me ? What d'you mean, Noel ? "

The other was silent for a moment, then he murmured ,quickly.

" I don't quite know what I do mean. Hadn't you better tell me first why you were dogging him ? What's the man done ? "

Marilyn shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

" I don't know," she answered, " I just followed him because . . . because . . . oh, well, he was running away."

For a moment Noel Venn stared at her aghast, somewhat undecided as to whether he should burst into laughter or not, but there was a gravity about the girl which at once dismissed the temptation. In spite of her words he was convinced that Marilyn had felt some far more serious reason for that nocturnal pursuit than she had as yet admitted. But the girl herself realized that she had, perhaps, been a trifle vague.

"I heard a shriek," she went on quickly, "and then I saw a figure dart out of a window on the first floor and get down by the fire escape. It all looked pretty sinister to me, so I just set chase."

"Very plucky of you, too," said Noel Venn admiringly, "but not exactly the safest thing to do."

"Oh, I thought I might meet a policeman! I thought it was a burglar, you see. That's why I was going into the doctor's house . . . to warn him that the man must be hiding in his garden, only . . ."

But the young man's grasp on her arm had tightened excitedly: there was an urgency about him which stemmed the words on her lips.

"That's it," he muttered eagerly, "that's the thing to do. Take the wind out of his sails. Splendid! Look here, Marilyn, we've got to get this man to believe that he's not suspected . . . and you're the one who's got to do it. Will you? It's going to need a good bit of courage."

She did not hesitate for one moment but nodded her head at once; when she spoke, however, her voice sounded perplexed.

" Of course I will, Noel. Only . . . what d'you want me to do ? "

" Exactly what you were going to do before he lit that lamp . . . knock at the door and tell the doctor that you think there's a burglar hiding in his garden. Help him to look for the fellow . . . of course you won't find anyone . . . then come back here and we'll trot along to Mr. Malcolm and tell him all about it. I'll slip under those bushes over there and wait for you. Will you do it ? "

" Of course."

Marilyn spoke quite casually and the young man smiled at her with pleasure.

" Good girl," he said. " Don't be long . . . and good luck, darling."

She gave a breathless little laugh and then, moving quickly out from the shelter of the bushes, walked briskly down the road and swung open the gate on which was hung that brass inscription.

Like a shadow Noel Venn slipped across the road and under some bushes in a garden opposite, whence he had an excellent view of the doctor's house. With his heart beating fast in excitement he watched the girl walk swiftly up the path, press her fingers to the bell-push on the door, wait a few moments for her summons to be answered, and then the door swung open. There was a hurried conversation and in another moment Marilyn walked unhesitatingly over the threshold and the door clanged to behind her.

Even as she vanished from his sight a sudden grim foreboding filled the heart of Noel Venn with an uneasy fear.

CHAPTER XXII

Venn hastens Home in Daylight

THE minutes passed . . . three . . . five . . . but to the watching man they seemed twice as long. Crouched beneath the overhanging branches of a lilac bush he remained motionless, his eyes fixed on the door of the house before him, expecting each instant to see it flung open and Marilyn, accompanied by the gaunt figure of the doctor, appear upon the threshold. But as the minutes lengthened into five the fear which had entered into the heart of Noel Venn when first he heard the sinister clang of the door as it closed upon Marilyn, increased to panic. Five minutes was far too long a space of time for Marilyn to take explaining the purpose of her visit to this man; two would have been ample. And yet even now Noel Venn hesitated to act, even now he felt loth to enter the house himself and thus expose and ruin their plan. For that something far more important, far more sensational than any mere attempt at robbery lay behind the doctor's spectacular escape from the hotel that night, the young man had no doubts. In some way, he felt sure, it was connected with the grim happenings that had occurred in that place so recently, and by walking across the road and entering the doctor's house Noel Venn knew well that he would be destroying a very valuable asset . . . the fact that so far the doctor probably felt himself immune from suspicion.

But what of Marilyn, venturing alone into the dwelling of this man about whose character Noel Venn had now begun to cherish some most unpleasant doubts ? Dare he wait any longer to see whether his fears were but unhappy imaginings, dare he wait while those same fears might be proving themselves only too disastrously accurate ?

Another few minutes passed, and then Noel Venn could stand the strain no longer. Mr. Malcolm and his plans mattered nothing at all where the safety of Marilyn Gaynor was at stake. Casting one last glance at the silent house before him, the young man rose swiftly to his feet, swung open the gate on which was hung that brass inscription, and marching up the path, taking no pains to remain noiseless or unobserved, he pressed one finger to the bell at the side of the door and waited . . . waited in an agony of suspense for his summons to be answered.

A few seconds passed . . . but there came no sound from the house before him, no sudden scurry of approaching feet, no clanging of some door opened in a room within, nothing . . . and with sinking heart and a bitter anxiety filling his mind Noel Venn pressed the bell again, pressed it this time with a determination which forbade that anyone within should possibly remain unaware of such a summons.

Again he waited . . . but still there came no movement from within . . . and without wasting further time the young man darted swiftly from the porch and slipped around the house towards that window on the ground floor over which a blind had so recently been pulled. There was now no light shining within : possibly it had been extinguished while he was holding that whispered conversation with the girl under the shelter of those bushes, for Noel Venn did not remember that it had still been lighted when he had taken up his stance opposite the house.

Pausing only for one moment in order to satisfy himself that the window-sash was barred and therefore could not be opened from without, the young man seized a large stone which formed part of a border around a flower-bed in the garden, and flinging it with all his might crashed the pane of glass into a thousand fragments. The noise of splintering glass sounded enormous in the silence of the night . . . but still there came no movement from the house.

A second Venn waited, and then, regardless of the jutting pieces of broken glass which still remained hanging in the window, he clambered recklessly inside, pushed the blind away and let himself down quickly into the darkened room.

Venn had made no attempt to conceal his entry from anyone who might be looking, and he stood there now in the darkness, uncertain as to how he should act. His one idea, in fact the only idea in his brain, was to make an entry, no matter how, into that house which had now assumed such a sinister aspect in his thoughts. In the forefront of his mind was the great fear that Marilyn was in danger, and his determination that at all costs he would get near to her in order to protect the girl from whatever danger or foes with which she might have to contend.

But as he stood there now he began to realize the folly of his impetuous actions. In the first place, he had given a very definite warning of his presence ; he had allowed his enemies, if, indeed, Marilyn was in villainous hands, plenty of time in which to prepare themselves for his arrival. Even now, perhaps in the darkness of that room through which his eyes could not pierce, someone was waiting for him, someone was watching him, alert to anticipate his every movement. For Venn realized that standing where he was before the shattered window with the pale light of the first break of dawn acting as background, his outline must be easily discernible to anyone within. But the thought in no way disturbed him. He cursed himself for a fool for having made so much noise, for having advertised his presence there so loudly, but on the other hand he felt that perhaps the rapidity of his entry into that house had been of infinite gain. He realized also, however, that to stand where he was, cogitating as to his next action, was but to lose all the advantage he had thereby achieved, and at once he made up his mind. The first thing to do was to discover the electric light switch, then the door, and afterwards he could proceed to investigate the house in his search for Marilyn.

Advancing swiftly across the room he immediately cannoned into a chair : continuing now more cautiously he reached the wall, and feeling along it soon discovered the door. Assuming that very probably the switch was close to this door, Venn ran his fingers up and down the wall near to it and almost immediately they closed upon it. With light flooding the room Venn felt more confident, especially as his first glance around assured him that no one stood there awaiting him ; but even as this comforting realization came to him his eyes fell upon an object on the floor which made him catch his breath in startled surprise.

Obviously this room was the doctor's study, for a large desk stood diagonally across one corner, and protruding from one side of this Venn saw the foot of a man. He did not hesitate a moment. In two strides he was across the room and in a very short space of time he had lifted from behind the desk the limp form of a man whose clothes he vaguely recognized. A glance at his features, however, assured Noel

Venn that it was indeed the doctor himself. But instead of the spruce, almost dandified figure of the man whom he had seen busying himself in his professional duties at the hotel only a few hours before, the limp form before him presented a strangely different spectacle. The first thing which struck Noel Venn was the fact that around one temple there was wound a cloth, and from its bloodstained condition it was obvious that the wound had bled profusely. His clothes were dishevelled and in one place severely torn. It was only too clearly apparent that the doctor must have taken part in some grim struggle from which he had emerged the loser.

Even as he realized this, Noel Venn dropped from his arms on to the floor the body of that man about whom he had so recently held grievous doubts. The sound of the head as it thudded heavily on to the carpet rather sickened the young man, and he looked down quickly in some slight alarm. From his kneeling posture, however, the distance to the floor had been but small, and Venn reflected with a grim smile, that one knock more or less would make little difference to the unconscious man.

The whole situation was now entirely altered and through the young man's mind there ran tumultuous thoughts. Evidently when the doctor had pulled down that blind, perhaps intending thereupon to retire to bed, he had been attacked. Marilyn's first impression, that an intruder had entered the doctor's garden, must have been correct. Venn rose to his feet but his brain continued its rapid reconstruction as to the probable course of events. Possibly the pulling of that blind had been the last act the doctor had made before his assailant had struck: perhaps as he had sat there with his back to the door the intruder had entered and had then leapt upon him. That the fight had been a violent one was only too obvious, as also was the fact that the doctor had made a firm resistance, for now that Venn glanced around once more he was aware of certain corroborative details which had escaped him up till then. A small table had been overturned, and near it on the floor lay strewn its former contents, an ash tray, a box of cigarettes and a couple of daily papers. This was not in line with his own advent into that room and could not possibly have been caused by him at the moment of collision with that chair in the dark.

Assuming all this to be correct, events to have occurred as his brain suggested, what then had happened to Marilyn, where did she enter into this reconstruction? The shock of discovering the doctor senseless on the floor, the turmoil in his thoughts as he sought to readjust them to the facts as they now stood, had momentarily driven the girl from the forefront of his mind. But now she returned to it only too vividly, and in an agony of remorse and self-recrimination Noel Venn guessed at what must have taken place when, without hesitating for one moment, she had so gallantly agreed to his proposal. The man who had opened the door to her could have been none other than him whom she had pursued courageously but a little while before : possibly he had assumed the rôle of butler and had informed her that he would bring her to his master.

As these thoughts raced through his mind with lightning swiftness, Venn remained as if paralysed, utterly unable to move, stunned with horror at the realization of all that must have happened. But then he was spurred into a sudden frenzy of action. He had given away his presence in that room : there was, therefore, no slightest need for any silence or care. Whoever had admitted Marilyn into the house and had thereupon entrapped her, must be well aware of his own coming. With his face set into lines of grim determination Noel Venn looked around him in search of some weapon. His glance fell to the fireplace, and at once he moved swiftly over to it. Leaning down he lifted a short but heavy poker which was placed beside the grate, and in two strides he was at the door. Without pausing a moment he flung this open and marched into the hall. The light from the room he had just left streamed out into the passage, dispelling its darkness to a certain extent, but leaving several corners filled with sinister shadows. Venn steeled himself to action. Any hesitation now would be fatal to his chances of finding Marilyn : he must act with rapidity and throw undue caution to the winds.

Moving across towards the door, eagerly his fingers crept along the wall beside it, seeking for the switch. A second later they seized on it and immediately the hall was well illuminated, and Venn could see that in those shadowy corners there lurked nothing to cause alarm. Another room lay behind that into which he had so recklessly clambered, and hastening to this door the young man flung it open, switched on the light and stared around him at the cosy furnishings of the doctor's dining-room. There was no one within, no sign of any disturbance, and with a heavy heart he moved out again into the hall. A wide staircase of polished wood, bare of any carpet, wound upwards to the next floor, and in a very few moments Noel Venn had ascended this and his eager eyes were engrossed in a swift examination of the two rooms above. Here, also, however, there was nothing of interest. The place was deserted and nowhere was there anything to denote disorder. In what Venn assumed to be the doctor's bedroom, the clothes had been neatly turned down upon his bed in readiness for his retirement, and it was obvious to the young man that nothing of any moment had occurred up here. Wearily he returned to the staircase and descended it slowly, for now all energy seemed to have vanished from his limbs; they were weighted with that leaden despair which gripped so miserably at his heart.

It had taken him some little time to investigate the house, and now that he returned to the ground floor again he saw that outside it had become much lighter and the artificial illumination which he had left on was no longer necessary. The young man wasted no time extinguishing it, however. Instead, he made a quick descent into the basement and proceeded with his search. He was surprised to find that although the kitchen was neat and clean and adequately stocked with provisions, proving it to be in use, the room which ordinarily would have been occupied by a servant—for Venn realized that this small house would only require the services of one—was not only empty but also quite unfurnished. Despite the anguish in his mind as to the safety of Marilyn Gaynor, it occurred to Venn that a daily maid must be employed by the doctor, and that, therefore, the man must be alone in the house all night—a circumstance which would have contributed largely to the ease with which the intruder had carried out his attack. This fact, he now understood, should have been obvious to him in the first place, for the noise which he had made when ringing that bell and crashing open the window would assuredly have awoken any servant who had slept below.

Venn returned to the hall. He was feeling distracted, sick with fear as to Marilyn's probable fate, for now he did not doubt for one moment but that something dreadful had befallen the girl, and a despairing hopelessness filled his heart at his own impotence to rush to her aid. But Noel Venn was not of the type too readily to admit defeat. It occurred to him that a quick examination of the ground around the house might provide him with some clue as to the method by which Marilyn had been spirited away: for removed she must have been, since his search had been thorough and he could find no slightest trace to denote her presence. Even as this thought came to him he remembered Mr. Malcolm, and at once he realized that his best course would be to return to the hotel and inform Mr. Malcolm of all that had happened that night: for he, with his trained brain, would be far more capable than Venn of extracting any clues from an examination of the house and the ground outside.

His mind made up, Venn returned once more into that room through the window of which he had made his spectacular entry into the house. His eyes fell quickly to the form of the doctor lying as he had left him, motionless upon the floor, and the thought came to him that he ought to do something for this man, ought at least to make quite certain that he was dead; for if not, a little succour at the moment might be the means actually of saving his life.

Quickly Venn moved over to the desk, gently lifted the limp figure on to its back and noted what in the electric light—which although turned on now made no effort to compete with the dawn outside—he had not remarked before : that in his cheeks there was now a little colour, and although unconscious the man was still breathing. Loosening his collar and shirt, Venn seized a cushion that lay on a chair and propped up his head upon it, then without wasting another moment he clambered quickly out of the house through that window by which he had entered, and set off rapidly in the direction of the hotel.

It was now quite light, and even as Venn raced up the steps of the Supreme and burst breathlessly into the lounge—much to the astonishment of a startled and sleep-bemused night-watchman—the pale light of the early-morning sun streamed upwards from the far horizon on to the grey stone of that picturesque huddle of houses which is St. Andrews.

CHAPTER XXIII

Venn finds Mr. Malcolm Awake

MR. MALCOLM looked at the telephone with great distaste. In the first place he had been thoroughly enjoying his dream, such simplified sleuthing appealing to him enormously : in the second place, any sudden awakening through the medium of outside interference always acted upon him as an irritant, and in this instance particularly so, for Mr. Malcolm felt that he had earned the short repose which was all that had been left to him of the night as a result of his activities with Inspector Varney. However, a telephone bell is persistent and inevitable : Mr. Malcolm realized that there was nothing to be done but to lift the receiver and to answer the summons. But first he looked at the travelling-clock which stood on the table by his side, and again he was displeased to notice that he had been allowed but two hours of sleep. It was still very early in the morning, although the sun had now determined for the wild life outside that the day had at last begun.

With a sigh Mr. Malcolm lifted the receiver and in a sleepy voice acknowledged his existence. But if Mr. Malcolm had been annoyed and irritated by the loud shattering of his slumber, and if his voice had sounded sleepy when first he had been jerked to wakefulness, the very first words which he heard over the wire completed the process of wakening him very abruptly by arousing all his interest. For the voice that wished to communicate with him came from London, and in a few short moments Mr. Malcolm's attention was riveted upon what was being told to him from all those miles away. Mr. Malcolm himself took very little part in the conversation which then ensued, saying nothing beyond an occasional " Yes " or an occasional " No," but his active brain was now eagerly at work assimilating all that was being said.

In the middle of the conversation Mr. Malcolm was annoyed to notice that someone was knocking urgently at his door. With an apology to the invisible speaker, he interrupted the latter's flow of words for a sufficient length of time in which to shout " Come in," and then he returned to his former absorption in what he was being told. Again Mr. Malcolm was annoyed to discover that whoever had entered the room in response to his invitation, was endeavouring to address him.

" Mr. Malcolm ! " said an urgent voice. " Mr. Malcolm ! "

" Quiet, please ! " said Mr. Malcolm shortly. " I'm busy."

But he allowed his eyes to glance towards the door and saw that it was Noel Venn ; but a strangely dishevelled, unshaven Noel Venn, in whose eyes there was a singularly wild and distraught look, who stood before him.

" Shut the door," said Mr. Malcolm, " and shut up. I'll attend to you in a minute."

But it was not one minute but three or four before Mr. Malcolm hung up the receiver, and as he turned to Venn with a questioning glance on his face there was something in his eyes which told the young man that Mr. Malcolm had just received news and that he was excited.

" I'm very sorry, Mr. Malcolm," began Venn.

" Of course you are," said Mr. Malcolm, " but you didn't wake me up, so that's all right. Well ? Get on with it."

Noel Venn did.

He wasted no time in a hasty recital of all that had occurred in the last two hours, and he wasted no words, telling his story with the trained brevity of the newspaper man, which yet omits no important details. Throughout his story Mr. Malcolm made no attempt at interruption but listened to him quietly: when, however, he began to describe the little plan which Marilyn and he had concocted, Mr. Malcolm frowned.

" Dash it ! " he said irritably, " when will even journalists become sensible ? To let a girl do that ! "

" We thought we were helping," said Venn, rather pathetically.

For a moment Mr. Malcolm looked at him.

" Yes," he said, " I understand, but . . . it makes it much more difficult. I'm sorry. I won't interrupt again. Go on."

Noel Venn completed the story, but even as he was speaking Mr. Malcolm had jumped from his bed and had started to dress himself hastily. By the time that the tale was told Mr. Malcolm was already completely attired.

" I think," said Mr. Malcolm, " we will go straight along and see the doctor. I hope he may be all right by now."

Venn looked at him in surprise.

" But that can't be, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " I left him still unconscious. He had evidently been unconscious for some time and looked like remaining so for quite a while."

" As soon as he returns to consciousness," said Mr. Malcolm quietly, " he may have a good deal of interest to tell us. I want to see him . . . badly. How long is it since you left the house ? "

" Twenty minutes at the most," said Venn.

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm thoughtfully.

For a moment he stood by the window looking out at the sea ; but his eyes saw nothing of the beauty of the morning, they were blind to the gay sparkling of the sun upon the glistening waves beating so musically on the shingle of the shore, blind to those white winged seagulls that swooped down low in graceful whirls above them. For in the eyes of Mr. Malcolm there was a far-away look, a look which seemed to be going right through what they were telling him and to be observing something which was going on hundreds of miles away. However, with the rapidity with which it had come this expression vanished instantaneously.

Mr. Malcolm turned suddenly and moved over to the telephone which he had recently so actively resented. Lifting the receiver he asked for a number and was very soon put through to the police station. Mr. Malcolm gave some quick precise orders and he phrased them in such a manner that he left no possible doubt about the exact nature of his requirements, and then promptly returning the receiver to its hook he looked towards Noel Venn.

" I think we are ready," he said. " Come on ! "

They had advanced but a few paces down the corridor, however, when a voice from behind called Mr. Malcolm agitatedly by name. Turning at once Venn was astonished to see a young man bearing down upon them, waving in his hand a yellow foolscap envelope.

" Inspector Varney told me to let you have this immediately you awoke, Mr. Malcolm," he gasped breathlessly. " He said it was most important."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" Thank you, Constable Mackintosh," he said ; he cast a keen glance at the tired face of the man before him and then looked at his watch. " Not much longer now, Constable," he added kindly.

" Thank you, sir."

The constable sounded grateful, but without waiting another moment Mr. Malcolm turned on his heel and, followed by the mystified journalist, entered the lift. Here, however, Mr. Malcolm, before operating its mechanism, slit open the envelope and scanned the contents of a foolscap sheet that was contained therein. There was a curious look in his eyes as he placed it in his pocket and started the lift ; a look which, despite his curiosity, forbade any questioning on the part of Noel Venn.

It was not until they had left the hotel that the young man ventured a remark.

" You telephoned to have the doctor watched," he said, " but why ? Surely the fact that he was attacked has cleared him ? Surely our suspicions were unfounded ? "

Mr. Malcolm walked four paces before he answered, but then he turned to the young man by his side.

" Noel, my friend," he said, and Venn noted with pleasure that for the first time the great Mr. Malcolm had now addressed him by his Christian name, " one can never be too careful. One can so seldom believe appearances."

" Appearances ? " Venn was astonished. " What do you mean, Mr. Malcolm ? It wasn't his appearance that made us doubt him. It was merely a case of mistaken identity . . . we thought he was the man who had left the hotel."

Mr. Malcolm walked another four paces before he replied.

" Nevertheless," he said, " appearances so often tell a lie."

CHAPTER XXIV

Noel Venn is instructed to order Porridge

MR. MALCOLM and Venn took a very short time to reach the doctor's house, and once at the gate Mr. Malcolm followed Venn through the garden around the house towards that window through which the young man had made his somewhat unorthodox entry not so very long before. Rapidly Venn climbed through again and turning back helped the older man to perform the same feat. Then together they both stared around the room.

A startled exclamation came from Venn, an exclamation which needed no interpreting, for at his first glance Mr. Malcolm had realized what had provoked it. There was now no sign of the doctor lying upon the floor, although the cushion still rested somewhat incongruously upon the carpet before the fireplace, and that table which Venn had described as being overturned upon the ground had not been righted, the articles which once had reposed upon it lying strewn all around.

Mr. Malcolm looked at Venn.

"Noel," he said, "is that cushion in the same place as when you left it?"

Noel Venn was quick to answer.

" It is."

" Ah ! " said Mr. Malcolm.

He looked about him and Noel Venn caught the glint in his eyes and noticed that alert expression which Mr. Malcolm always bore in moments of difficulty. But the elder man's next action was performed automatically by force of his tidy habits, and in no way interrupted the trend of his thoughts. Mr. Malcolm moved over to the switch and turned off the light, now entirely unnecessary.

" He's gone ! " suddenly said Venn.

Even as he spoke the words he realized their futility and the young man almost blushed. But Mr. Malcolm did not appear to notice : it was only after a somewhat lengthy pause that he made any remark.

" Yes, Noel," he said, " he's gone."

For a moment still he hesitated, and then he looked the other straight in the face.

" Let's see," he said, " if he went because he wanted to or if he was taken away."

Without another word he turned to the door. This was still open. Mr. Malcolm walked through.

" Where is his bedroom ? " he asked.

" This way," said Venn.

He led the way upstairs and straight to the door of the bedroom. It was closed. Venn noticed this and turned to Mr. Malcolm.

" I left this door open," he said.

" And it's now shut," said Mr. Malcolm, " denoting that someone has been here."

He moved towards it and knocked. A voice from within bade him enter. Mr. Malcolm opened the door and walked in. Venn was very close upon his heels, for the young man was quite resolved that were there to be any further horse-play he was going to be in it. But the sight which met his eyes caused him to unclench his fists and relax his muscles. Looking very pale and tired the doctor was seated on his bed : he was half undressed. Venn noticed that a bit of compress adorned his left temple and was held in place by a piece of sticking plaster.

" I'm so sorry," Mr. Malcolm's voice interrupted Venn's thoughts, " so sorry to disturb you, doctor. Especially to have broken in upon you so unceremoniously like this. . . ."

The doctor looked at him without replying for a moment, and when he spoke his voice was low.

" Ah ! Mr. Malcolm," he said. " And how did *you* get in ? I didn't hear you ring."

Mr. Malcolm laughed.

" I'm quite sure you didn't," he said, " for the very simple reason that I didn't ring. I knew that you hadn't got a resident maid and so we climbed in through the window. You see, doctor, I've had rather a startling report from my young friend here."

Mr. Malcolm moved over to the doctor and sat down beside him on the bed.

" How are you feeling, doctor ? " he asked.

The ghost of a smile sprang to life on the other's face.

" I'm feeling exactly as though I had received a most severe knock on the left temple," he said. " Since this is precisely what has happened, I'm not surprised."

Mr. Malcolm laughed.

" Good," he said. " Recovering yourself, I see. That's splendid. But listen, doctor. Can you tell me as briefly as you like, merely the outlines of what has happened ? You see, there's more in this than . . . well, perhaps, than you know about."

The doctor looked at him.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " I have no idea what happened. I was sitting up, working late. I do a lot of research work, you know. It was very late, much later than I thought, for I had become lost in my work. Suddenly I realized what time it was and noticed that I had not pulled down the blinds at my window. I moved over to it, pulled them down, returned to my desk and considered the question of going to bed."

" Have you any idea what time it was ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" I think it was just a little after three," said the doctor. " You see, Mr. Malcolm, after I had been to see my patient at the hotel and had made that rather startling discovery which I reported to you, I was slightly upset when I returned here. In order to relieve my mind before going to rest I thought I would do a little work . . . and I became absorbed. Having pulled those blinds I thought I would just finish the chapter I was reading and I sat down again at my desk. The window was open . . . must have been, for without any previous warning at all I suddenly heard a crash behind me. I looked round and was just in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of a figure dashing at me. The crash I heard was the overturning of a small occasional table which held an ash-tray and one or two other small objects. Presumably my assailant had knocked it over in making his rush at me, for I only caught that one glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye. I then knew no more until a short time ago when I found myself lying on the floor with my head on a cushion."

The doctor smiled.

" At least," he added, " the ruffian had the grace to make me comfortable."

" I am afraid he didn't," said Mr. Malcolm. " That was our young friend Noel Venn here who found you."

" Venn ! " said the doctor in a surprised voice. " Venn ! But how did *he* find me ? "

" That is a long story, doctor," said Mr. Malcolm, " and one that I do not propose to worry you with for the moment. But I should like a description of your assailant."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

" I'm afraid," he said, " I can scarcely give it to you. Remember, it was only as I turned from my desk in startled astonishment at the noise of the overturning table that I even caught the barest glimpse of him. All that I can say is that he was a man of about my own build."

" Nothing more ? "

" No." The doctor shook his head. " I'm afraid nothing more."

" When you recovered consciousness," said Mr. Malcolm, " what did you do ? "

The doctor smiled.

" I needn't go into the medical details," he said, " unless you insist, but I acted exactly as someone is very much inclined to do who has had a severe knock and been unconscious for a little while."

" I don't understand," said Mr. Malcolm.

" I was very sick," said the doctor. " I have a raging headache now, Mr. Malcolm. I know that you are officially connected with the police, although in what capacity I am not quite clear, so I presume that this interrogation is necessary, but please make it as short as you can. I have a raging headache."

Mr. Malcolm rose to his feet at once.

" I am extremely sorry, doctor," he said, " but what I had to ask you was necessary. Don't you think that perhaps you should receive . . ."—he hesitated—" medical aid ? "

The doctor laughed.

" I don't think it's necessary," he said.

" After all, I know exactly what to do. Rest is all that I need. I have dressed my wound and it is not serious, thank God. I have given myself a draught which should do me good. I am now prescribing for myself peace and quiet."

He looked at Mr. Malcolm. Mr. Malcolm looked back at him.

" Until ? "

To the young man who was watching them both, the word, although spoken in exactly the same tone as Mr. Malcolm's previous remarks, seemed curiously in the nature of a challenge.

" Until very much later to-day," said the doctor, in a voice so even and unperturbed that Noel Venn told himself he must have been mistaken in attributing any ominous significance to Mr. Malcolm's question, for it was obvious that the doctor himself did not so regard it.

" Supposing," said Mr. Malcolm, " that I came round after lunch ? Would you be prepared to see me ? "

" I am prepared to see you at any time, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor, " and with great pleasure, but . . . I fail to see what more I can do or say. I've told you all I know. After I had recovered a little I naturally had a good search through the house . . . but I found nobody here."

" And no property missing ? " asked Mr. Malcolm quickly.

The doctor was silent for a moment, and then he shrugged his shoulders listlessly.

" I really haven't felt well enough to look thoroughly, Mr. Malcolm," he said, " but nothing appears to be missing."

" But surely you realized," said Mr. Malcolm quietly, " that this attack upon you was a matter for the police. Have you notified them ? "

" No."

" Why not ? "

" I don't know," said the doctor quietly. " I didn't perhaps wish to prosecute or proceed with the matter."

" Thank you, doctor," replied Mr. Malcolm. " You are very frank with me and I appreciate the fact, but all the same, the matter *is* now in the hands of the police, for I shall inform them of all that has happened."

" Even if I, who, after all, must prosecute, should refuse to act if you make an arrest ? " asked the doctor.

" Even in that case," answered Mr. Malcolm, very quietly. " You see, there is a great deal more behind this than merely—you must excuse the apparent disparagement—the attack upon your person. This attack all fits in, doctor, with a great many other things, things which have happened in St. Andrews within the last twenty-four hours, things with which . . . you are acquainted."

Once again Noel Venn thought he noticed

something almost threatening in the slight pause which had preceded Mr. Malcolm's last three words, but once again he felt this must be an illusion, for without hesitating a moment the doctor answered, and in his voice, casual and completely even, there was no slightest hint that he also had received the same impression.

" You are very mysterious, Mr. Malcolm," he said. " But naturally I don't feel fit for the moment to talk any further. Very well—do as you wish, and I may expect you some time early this afternoon."

Mr. Malcolm took a step towards the other.

" Can I help you, doctor ? " he said.

It was obvious that his offer related to assisting him to bed.

The doctor smiled.

" It's kind of you," he said, " but there's no need. I can manage quite well by myself."

" One other thing," said Mr. Malcolm. " When does your servant arrive ? Wouldn't you like us to make you a cup of tea or something of that sort ? "

The doctor shook his head.

" No, thanks," he said again. " It's very kind of you, Mr. Malcolm, but she will arrive some time before eight and I shall sleep until then. One thing you might do, though. Stick this on the door of my bedroom as you leave."

He leant towards the small table by his bedside and removing an envelope from it handed this to Mr. Malcolm. Mr. Malcolm glanced down at it and noted that it bore a request to the housekeeper not to awake him until he rang. Evidently this had been prepared and was about to be placed on the door when Mr. Malcolm had arrived. Just for one second he stared at the note with a puzzled frown on his face, and then all trace of it vanished and he turned once again to the doctor.

" I shall call," he said, " in between the morning and the afternoon rounds. I should hate to miss more of the Championship than I can help, and until we have our conference I don't think there is much more to do. So I shall see you then, doctor. Until which time —rest well ! "

The doctor smiled.

" Thank you. I have made full artificial arrangements to rest well ! "

Mr. Malcolm turned to the door and left the room closely followed by Noel Venn. He closed it gently behind him and wetting the gum on the envelope fixed it to the lintel. Without a word he descended the stairs and returned to that room by which they had made entry. Mr. Malcolm sat down on a chair. Mr. Malcolm crossed his legs and folded his arms. Noel Venn looked at him in surprise.

" What are you going to do ? " he asked.

" Think," said Mr. Malcolm. " Think like hell, young man. In the meantime you'd better get some rest. Go back to the hotel and have some breakfast waiting for me at half-past nine. Bacon and eggs and coffee. See that it's punctual . . . and hot."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" But what about Marilyn ? "

The young man could not resist the question.

" You need some rest," said Mr. Malcolm, " and I forgot—some porridge before the bacon and eggs."

Noel Venn reluctantly but rightly decided that he had received his dismissal.

CHAPTER XXV

Mr. Malcolm asks a Question

MR. MALCOLM did not sit very long ruminating over the situation. But he had felt the urge to be alone, a desire completely to co-ordinate his thoughts and to have all his facts at his finger-ends before actually embarking on that course of action on which he had already determined. He sat in that armchair for just long enough to smoke one cigarette, and during that time an observer would have noticed that Mr. Malcolm appeared to be half asleep. He made no movement. He allowed the soothing tobacco to drift lazily from the corners of his mouth. His eyes remained half closed, indeed for some seconds at a time fully closed, but as he threw the stump of his cigarette into the grate, his whole appearance changed. He became alert and purposeful, and in his eyes there was shining that curious light which, when he was working, always spelt danger for someone.

Mr. Malcolm did not immediately pursue the plan on which he had already decided, but going down on his hands and knees proceeded to make a minute examination of every inch of the carpet in the room, particularly that portion of it which was near to the desk. When he arose to his feet some minutes later and carefully dusted his trousers with one hand, there was a satisfied expression on his face, although his mouth was set in a hard straight line. For Mr. Malcolm had found no sign of any bloodstain whatsoever.

Turning sharply on his heel Mr. Malcolm walked to the door. This he opened, and moving across the hall he advanced up the stairs, halting before the room which bore that notice he had himself so recently affixed. Mr. Malcolm looked at it. Mr. Malcolm read it through once more. Mr. Malcolm smiled, and then he knocked smartly on the door. Without waiting for an answer he opened it gently and walked in.

" Excuse me, doctor," he said, " but I've now decided that it would be inadvisable to postpone our discussion until this afternoon."

The doctor, whom Mr. Malcolm's sudden entrance had disturbed in the act of pulling on his coat, moved slowly to the bed and seated himself upon it. For a second Mr. Malcolm's quick eyes glanced over him and in that second he did not fail to note that the other had in no way proceeded with his disrobing, for he had now resumed his coat and boots and his shirt collar was once more in order about his throat. Mr. Malcolm, however, did not remark upon this fact : instead, he moved purposefully across the room towards a chair which stood before the fireplace, and seating himself in this he turned expectantly to the other.

For another moment the doctor remained silent: there was a haggardness in his face, a nervous gleam in the eyes that stared at Mr. Malcolm. Then suddenly he spoke and in his voice was a note of weariness and forced toleration.

"Really, Mr. Malcolm," he said, "aren't you being just a little unfeeling? I thought I had made it sufficiently clear to you that I am in no fit state to be questioned at the moment. Had *you* received a blow on the head like me . . . I'm sure you'd be more sympathetic."

Mr. Malcolm stared at him unmoved: for a moment almost an amused gleam darted to his eyes, but the next instant it had vanished. Leaning forward and speaking very solemnly Mr. Malcolm put a question.

"Why did you shriek in room number thirty-seven last night?" he asked.

The doctor looked at him.

"*What?*"

"I only asked you," said Mr. Malcolm calmly, "why you cried out aloud, very much aloud if I may say so, in room number thirty-seven in the early hours of this morning?"

For a moment the doctor seemed completely taken aback and stared at Mr. Malcolm as though he suspected him of having lost his senses. Then he laughed.

"You are obviously having a jest, Mr.

Malcolm. I've already told you, I think, that when you no longer required my services in the hotel last night, or rather in the early hours of this morning, I returned here and pursued my researches in order to quieten my mind."

"Very well," said Mr. Malcolm, "if that is your story and you propose to stick to it, I shall have to explain one or two things to you. It may take some time."

"There's a great deal, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor, his tone for the first time becoming slightly hostile, "about which I should like an explanation. Since you insist upon our discussion taking place now I can do nothing but agree—only I must be given your complete reasons, preparatory to your apology which also must come, for the extraordinary attitude which you've adopted."

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

"Since you refuse to answer my perfectly simple question," he said, "I am compelled to go into details. Are you prepared for rather a long session?"

"Perfectly," said the doctor, "as long as you like, provided that all can be made clear to me at the end."

"All," said Mr. Malcolm, "will indisputably be made only too clear. Now listen to me, Doctor Holmes."

For one second the doctor's eyes narrowed involuntarily, a movement which Mr. Malcolm was quick to notice, but in the next instant he was again completely master of himself.

" My name," he said, " is Mannering."

" Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, " that is no lie, I realize ; but you changed your name by law some twenty years ago from Holmes to Mannering. Scotland Yard, my friend, has a long memory and an efficient method of imparting its knowledge to its agents, no matter how far away from London these may be. At the present moment we are a mere four hundred miles and the information which I received early this morning has been of great use to me."

" It appears," said the doctor quietly, " to have made you very sure of yourself."

" It has," said Mr. Malcolm, " aided and abetted by certain discoveries of my own. It is necessary, in order to explain things fully to you, doctor, that I should go back a little. In the first place, the man whose dead body was found in a trunk in Edinburgh yesterday was named Dickson. The man whom you attended yesterday, who had the accident to his ankle and who called himself ' Dickson,' was really named Fletcher. Both these men have been traced, and Fletcher was undoubtedly attempting to impersonate Dickson. Their histories do not make very pleasant reading. Both have lived on their wits all their lives, both have spent long periods in prison, and it is largely from the finger-print record department that we have been able to trace them. Both, amongst their other activities, have indulged freely in blackmail.

" Now it so happens," went on Mr. Malcolm, " that they were on a blackmailing job when they reached St. Andrews. This job, if I may so describe it, was really Dickson's, but Fletcher came to know of it and the reason for his attempted impersonation of Dickson was in order to try to carry out the blackmail himself and get away with . . . shall we call it the boodle ? . . . before the real Dickson arrived at St. Andrews. He was thwarted in this by the unexpectedly early arrival of the man whom he was trying to double-cross, and he resorted to murder as the only way out."

Mr. Malcolm paused. Mr. Malcolm looked at the doctor. Mr. Malcolm waited for quite an appreciable space of time without speaking. But the other returned his gaze unmoved, his lips firmly closed, his expression stolid. Mr. Malcolm sighed.

" I'm sorry you're not going to help me," he said, " because you could tell me a little that I would like to know. Some facts which would help me to complete the story. However, I have given you your opportunity twice : the first time when I asked you if you shrieked, and the second when I said that Fletcher resorted to murder in order to rid himself of Dickson. *He did not.* Dickson was murdered all right, but not by Fletcher."

The doctor spoke for the first time.

" How very interesting," he said. " You have a most delightful way of telling a story, Mr. Malcolm. You ought to be a writer, not a policeman. But tell me, how do you know all this ? "

" I am presuming all this . . . and with me to presume is practically to know . . ." said Mr. Malcolm, " by intelligent deduction from facts which I have discovered and from the histories of the men concerned. Their recent movements we have been able to trace. They took a boat from Port Said to Marseilles and both left the boat at Marseilles, but whereas Dickson took the train journey across France, Fletcher flew and thus, as he thought, enabled himself to have the extra day or two which he required for his scheme. He had previously stolen from a concealed pocket in the lining of Dickson's coat the document which formed the backbone for the blackmail. An examination of Dickson's coat has given us this information."

" Do you mean to say," said the doctor, " that the mere fact of your having found that something had been removed from the lining of a man's coat has given you all this information ? "

" No, not exactly, but it has helped," said Mr. Malcolm quietly. " Someone talked. Someone always talks, you know, on these occasions ; that is why it's never safe to have a confederate. That is why I so seldom let anybody help me in my investigations."

He laughed.

" Doctor," he said, " I believed that Fletcher had killed Dickson until I discovered a most curious thing, and that was that whereas there was a bullet missing from Fletcher's revolver, although the barrel of the revolver was in a dirty state this condition was a fake . . . the weapon had not recently been fired. And another thing : let me tell you that the bullet which killed Dickson and which came into my possession, I must admit, in rather fortuitous a manner, since I discovered it in the lift, was not fired from Fletcher's gun. This I have been able to ascertain beyond any possibility of doubt. For your information let me tell you that revolvers have in certain cases their special characteristics as much as anything else, and that Fletcher's, in particular, had a very distinct fault which would have marked any bullet fired from it. Whereas the revolver which fired the shot that killed Dickson must, from the condition of the bullet, have been perfect.

" We will now continue," said Mr. Malcolm, after a short pause during which he smiled genially at the man before him, " to my reasons for not believing that Fletcher's death was suicide."

The doctor held up his hand.

" Before you continue, Mr. Malcolm," he

said, " I should like to congratulate you on an excellent piece of reasoning very clearly told, but I must admit that the police seem to have everything on their side. You have so much more information to draw on in respect to past life and history than the average person."

" A perfectly true fact," said Mr. Malcolm, " which is one of the chief reasons why crime does not pay. But let me continue."

" If," said the doctor, " you are going to continue, as you have already stated, by describing to me your reasons for supposing that Fletcher's death was not caused by his own hand, then you will find it very difficult to convince me. I think, Mr. Malcolm, that I have already told you that to me, as a medical man, the cause of death was perfectly obvious . . . as was also the method by which it occurred."

" I hope," said Mr. Malcolm, " to make you change your opinion. I didn't believe you at the time, and I'll tell you why. D'you remember the cause for the sprained ankle ? "

" Very clearly," said the doctor. " Dickson —or I suppose I should now call him Fletcher —fell down the stairs. You informed me, I think, that you were present at the time."

" I was," said Mr. Malcolm, " and when I reached him Fletcher distinctly murmured ' Who the hell did that ? ' This made me wonder . . . made me wonder a great deal. It was not the sort of thing a person says when he falls downstairs . . . particularly when he is in great pain, as he must have been. I asked you, if you remember, why he had fallen. You intimated, although you didn't actually say so, that it was because he had indulged in too many cocktails. I know very well that this was not so. I conversed with him and he was not drunk: I lit a cigarette for him and I am perfectly certain that he had not had a drink for some considerable time. There was no trace of it in the air as I bent my head towards him . . . and my sense of smell is trained. Therefore, I wasn't predisposed, perhaps, to take as gospel either your deductions or your reasons, and I began to examine the circumstances on my own.

" In the first place, he had obviously died from a very definite overdose of a sleeping-draught which you had provided. Now this sleeping-draught was taken from a bottle, but not directly from the bottle, for there were traces of it in a glass which was by the bedside. I had this glass and this bottle examined for finger-prints and on each of them there was a complete absence of any finger-prints . . . excepting those of the dead man."

" Well," said the doctor, " surely that proves my contention ? "

" On the contrary," said Mr. Malcolm, " it proves very definitely that someone other than the dead man must have tidied things up after the dose had been taken, and been very careful that no finger-prints were left on the glass excepting those of the dead man. After all, there is the maid who does that room: her finger-prints should have been on the glass at least. And what about your own? There were no finger-prints other than those of the dead man.

"My second point is that Fletcher's revolver is minus one bullet. But on examination I discovered that the revolver had not been fired recently, and that someone had attempted to convey the impression that it had. This is strange, for surely if the revolver had been used and anyone had cleaned it, that person would also have reloaded. But you must remember that I was in a peculiar position, for I knew that the bullet which had killed Dickson had not been fired from Fletcher's revolver.

"Thirdly, I had every reason to suspect from Fletcher's involuntary remark when he fell, that the accident of his falling downstairs was unlikely to have been an accident at all, but was probably contrived by someone purposely. I will return to that point again in a moment."

Mr. Malcolm paused. Mr. Malcolm withdrew from his pocket his cigarette-case, removed a cigarette and lit it. Mr. Malcolm lazily and luxuriously blew out a cloud of smoke, and when this had cleared away the doctor realized that from behind it Mr. Malcolm had been staring at him keenly, but almost at once he continued and his voice had changed not one jot.

" I also knew," said Mr. Malcolm, " that Fletcher was very eager to keep an appointment that night, and therefore that it was very improbable that he would have committed suicide, and equally improbable that he would have taken a sleeping-draught at all, even though the pain had been bad. You yourself told me that to take an overdose accidentally would have been very difficult ; it was, in fact, on this point that you based your opinion that his death was by his own hand. I should like to compliment you on that touch.

" Last, but by no means least, an examination of Fletcher's coat—for, naturally, we examined everything in the room—revealed the fact that something had been removed from its lining also. It had been slightly cut open, possibly with a pair of scissors, or perhaps even with a knife. This was interesting, for we thus came to the point where two men . . . two murdered men, doctor, had had their coats rifled after their deaths. It seems to prove that something, almost certainly *that* something which was to have been the instrument of blackmail, was concealed successively in these coats, and that they both lost their lives because of it. The person who stole from Dickson was Fletcher, and I now know that Fletcher did not kill him : there seems to be little doubt, however, that Dickson died because of that document, whatever it was. But the person who stole from Fletcher did kill him, and it occurred to me that if I could find out the importance of that document, which, as I have said before, was probably the instrument of blackmail . . . then I would probably be on the track of the murderer."

Mr. Malcolm paused. Mr. Malcolm threw away his half-finished cigarette. Mr. Malcolm looked across the intervening few feet towards the man who was seated opposite. But the doctor said no word. He sat there stolidly, his eyes, now that Mr. Malcolm had stopped speaking, removed to the fireplace and apparently fixed upon the unlit coal. For some appreciable time the two sat quite still and there was no sound in the room, and then the doctor suddenly looked up.

" A very convincing description of what probably occurred, Mr. Malcolm," he said, " but it is all surmise, isn't it ? "

" That," said Mr. Malcolm, " is for a jury to decide. To my mind the case is becoming increasingly clear with every moment. But I have not yet finished, doctor."

" No, Mr. Malcolm ? "

" No. I have not yet finished. I am now coming to the part of my tale which concerns you."

" Concerns me ? "

The doctor looked surprised.

" Doctor," said Mr. Malcolm, " you shouldn't have gone into the medical profession. You should have gone on the stage: you simulate surprise better than anyone I have ever met and you have got greater control over yourself than anyone I have seen. However, listen. These are briefly my reasons for being quite sure that *you* are Fletcher's murderer."

Mr. Malcolm paused. Mr. Malcolm looked very intently at the doctor, but the other merely smiled.

" Go on," he said.

" You made a statement, doctor, regarding that sleeping-draught. You told me that you had given Fletcher instructions to take the sleeping-draught if he had pain and that Fletcher took it. But you didn't know that previously Fletcher had told me how anxious he was to keep that appointment. I must say I think it very strange, in view of this fact, that Fletcher should yet have taken the sleeping-draught. Secondly, doctor, you told me a lie about having that draught sent from a chemist. You brought it yourself. No chemist in St. Andrews had been advised to send it. That, doctor, was a stupid slip."

" Slip, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor quietly, " is the right word. It is the sort of mistake which anybody might make. I was worried at the time. It was after his death that I told you. I was . . ."

" A little put out," broke in Mr. Malcolm, " at being asked the question. And no wonder. You had most replies ready, but there were one or two little things . . . seemingly unimportant . . . that you forgot about. Particularly the fact that there were only the dead man's finger-prints on either the glass or the bottle, which does not fit in with your statement when I asked you previously whether you had examined the residue in the glass in order to make quite sure that it was the sleeping-draught and not some poison that he had taken, your statement that you had carefully examined them both. I remembered this remark a little later, doctor, when I examined both articles for finger-prints and found only those of the dead man. I have," said Mr. Malcolm, with a smile, " a most inconvenient memory."

He paused, a pause in which, although he gave no indication of it, he sought to discover how his disclosures were being taken by the man before him. But the doctor never flinched.

" Go on, Mr. Malcolm," was all that he said.

" Fourthly," said Mr. Malcolm, " the fact that Scotland Yard gave me some interesting history was a great help. Dickson was a blackmailer and had served a term of imprisonment. Fletcher, also, was a blackmailer, but more of an adventurer, and for the moment let us forget him. Far back when Dickson was really prosperous as a blackmailer and before he served his sentence, he had a partner in London. This partner escaped from the police and could never be convicted owing to lack of evidence. He was a clever man, a doctor in Harley Street, but he had to give up his practice on Dickson's conviction . . . not only his medical practice but also the practice which he had made of giving particulars of the inside lives of his clients to Dickson and thus enabling the blackmailer to take steps. As I have said, this could never be absolutely proved, but so nearly could it be proved that that man left Harley Street, changed his name and came to St. Andrews twenty years ago, where since then he has been doing excellent work and leading a straight life."

"*I* came to St. Andrews twenty years ago," said the doctor.

"Yes," said Mr. Malcolm, "and it is you about whom I am speaking."

"Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor quietly. "It seems to me a very curious thing that you should make these accusations. Have you forgotten that this . . . Dr. Holmes was, I think, the name you said . . . got away with his crime—which I understand from you he has since been doing his very best to expiate—because he was too clever to be convicted? Does it not occur to you that you are going to find it very difficult to substantiate your accusations about me?"

"For what reason?" asked Mr. Malcolm, quite unperturbed.

"Primarily, of course, because I am entirely innocent of all the charges that you make against me."

"Stop," said Mr. Malcolm. "All right, I'll go on. I realized, doctor, that Fletcher must have been murdered during the dinner hour, and I asked the booking clerk if he had observed any stranger entering the hotel. He had not. I therefore tried to discover another and less public mode of entry, and it was only when I was trying to probe the strange ingress of the supposed burglar last night into room number thirty-seven that I discovered how it could be done. It could only be carried out by an athlete. Dr. Holmes was an athlete in his young days. The intruder's entry necessitated certain leaps which required nerve and agility. I know you to have both. Now will you tell me, perhaps, why you shrieked in that room last night?"

"Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor, "I would tell you if I could . . ."

"Ah!"

Mr. Malcolm could not restrain the exclamation.

"But as I wasn't there, I can't," went on the doctor.

He paused for a moment. Then he laughed.

"Oh," said Mr. Malcolm, smiling. "I see. Well, let me tell you exactly why I know you were there. Immediately after the shriek was heard I gave instructions to the police for a careful examination of the room to be made . . . a report as to their findings I have here——" Mr. Malcolm removed from his pocket that sheet of foolscap which had been handed to him by Constable Mackintosh not so very long before. "From this report I understand that a footprint was discovered in the window-box, a footprint presumably made by the burglar. This, however, proved on examination, to have been made by the shoe of the dead man who was lying on the bed in that room. It was, therefore, imprinted by the intruder as a blind, long before the shriek was heard. There can be no question that it was made by this shoe, doctor, because there is an unusual mark on the sole, presumably made by a sharp stone, and in the impression on the earth this mark is very clearly shown. The measurements also entirely agree. Now on this shoe, doctor, were found some very clear finger-prints. People should remember that the polished surface of a shoe lends itself to taking finger-prints."

Mr. Malcolm thought he noticed a subtle change in the man who sat opposite. Mr. Malcolm warmed to his work.

"Listen, doctor," he said quietly, "after I had come to see you a little while ago, I went downstairs, but I didn't leave this house. Instead I stayed here thinking, co-ordinating my thoughts, for you see, I had only received information by telephone from Scotland Yard giving me the history of this Dr. Holmes a short time before I came here. The reason why they bothered to telephone to me was because of the news published in the *Echo* of this morning—an excellent account, I may say, of last night's events, written by Noel Venn—and as you know, the first editions of the paper are issued as early as two o'clock in the morning. A sharp inspector realized that I was up here, realized also that I was probably working on the case and connected the name of Dr. Mannering with that of Dr. Holmes. You see, doctor, Scotland Yard never loses sight of its friends, particularly those who have cheated it of the reward of its labours. This Inspector thought I might be interested and decided to ring me up. I am very glad he did. But I had to connect the finger-prints found on that shoe with your own."

Mr. Malcolm paused for a moment and a subtle change came over him : there was a hint almost of self-approval in his voice as he continued :

" Now, doctor, we come to a part of my deductions about which, I must admit, I feel a trifle proud. You remember when I asked you to help yourself to some brandy last night, after the shock of finding Fletcher dead in his bed ? "

He looked towards the doctor questioningly. The other nodded stiffly.

" I remember," he said.

" I'm afraid I had my suspicions about you then, doctor," continued Mr. Malcolm slowly, " only vague suspicions, of course, nothing definite as yet. But it's a habit of mine to prepare beforehand . . . therefore I took the opportunity of obtaining your finger-prints . . ."

The doctor gave a smothered exclamation and half rose from his chair.

" A most abominable thing to do, Mr. Malcolm," he interrupted indignantly, " a betrayal of the ordinary rules of hospitality. I was your guest."

Mr. Malcolm nodded his head gravely.

" Admitted, doctor," he said seriously, " it would have been an abominable thing for me to do merely to my guest . . . but you see, I suspected you of being something else . . . of being, in fact, a murderer. In the circumstances, doctor "—Mr. Malcolm smiled slightly—" perhaps my lack of courtesy was not unpardonable. However, it has since proved to be . . . shall we say . . . a most valuable piece of foresight on my part. Because, Doctor Holmes "—a note of triumph tinged his voice—" your finger-prints tallied exactly with those that were found upon the shoe. Inspector Varney left a note to tell me this interesting fact. Thus there can be no possible doubt that it was you who shrieked in that room last night. Further than that, a spectator whom you already know—Miss Gaynor —saw a man leave the hotel, followed him without his knowledge, followed him to this house."

Mr. Malcolm's eyes had become hard. Mr. Malcolm's whole expression had followed suit. Mr. Malcolm's voice was harsh as he mentioned the girl's name.

" Now perhaps, doctor," he said, " you will tell me why you shrieked last night ? "

The doctor shook his head.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " you are making a most preposterous accusation."

Mr. Malcolm sighed.

" As you are not going to be sensible, doctor, let me merely mention one or two other little things," he said. " For instance, let me tell you that you have received two letters recently from foreign parts, one from Egypt and one from France, and let me tell you that the postman who delivered these letters, being, I am glad to say, of a curious nature, noticed that on the Egyptian letter the postmark was Port Said and on the French letter that of Marseilles.

" Dr. Holmes, Fletcher was afraid of you. Obviously he was unaware of your true identity, for he didn't recognize your name when you attended him. Dickson, of course, knew you, but not Fletcher. That was why Fletcher failed : perhaps why he lost his life. But he was afraid of someone. His accident down those stairs made that very clear to me, and I venture to suggest that it was you, Dr. Holmes, who engineered that fall in order to get him into your hands."

" But . . ."

" No," said Mr. Malcolm, " listen to me. You were in the hotel at the time. I have discovered that there is a back staircase, which means that you could have reached the lounge at just about the same time as Marilyn Gaynor did. I won't press this point, but I venture to suggest that it links up the whole story. Now are you going to come clean ? Now are you going to tell me ? "

There was a long pause. The doctor stared at Mr. Malcolm, but in his eyes now there was an entirely different expression. Instead of the successive gleams of impatience, annoyance, mock resignation and finally resentment, which had filled them momentarily throughout the last hour, there was a dawn almost of fear and certainly of awe.

" Can anyone escape from you, Mr. Malcolm ? "

The words were spoken very low.

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" I wish, doctor," he said, " that it was not my duty to arrest you for the murder of Fletcher. You, at any rate, are one of the few people who have attempted to expiate their crimes. Well ? Are you going to tell me ? "

" I shrieked," said the doctor quietly, " because I had to create the impression that a burglar had broken into that room and then caught sight of the dead man. The only way I could get in was by removing that pane of glass, so it wasn't possible to hide my tracks."

" And why did you go back to that room ? " asked Mr. Malcolm eagerly.

" Because," said the doctor, " I had forgotten one thing : I had to fake that revolver which never fired that shot at Dickson. You're quite right, Mr. Malcolm, *I* killed Dickson, too. Why Fletcher played into my hands like that I've no idea : perhaps he dare not risk the publicity that Dickson's death would naturally have brought to him as the only witness."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm.

There was a long pause during which the two men stared at each other. Suddenly Mr. Malcolm spoke.

" Why not remove that disfiguring piece of sticking plaster," he said coolly, " you'll hardly have any further use for it ; and I know there is no wound underneath."

But the doctor did not move : his eyes were still intent upon the other's face.

" Well," he said, " that was why I shrieked, Mr. Malcolm. What are you going to do about it ? "

" Just one more question," said Mr. Malcolm quietly, and all trace of any friendliness which might have been apparent in his voice before had now entirely vanished. " *Where is Marilyn Gaynor ?* "

CHAPTER XXVI

Mr. Malcolm has no Choice

"MARILYN GAYNOR," said the doctor, seeming to choose his words deliberately, "is perfectly safe."

If Mr. Malcolm felt any relief at these words he showed no sign of it, his expression changing not one jot or becoming the least bit more friendly. For a moment or two there was silence, and then the doctor spoke again.

"Really attractive and pretty girls like Miss Gaynor," he said, "seldom come to any harm."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Malcolm dryly, "it is usually the pretty ones who do. But you have not answered my question. Where is she ?"

"She is in this house, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor quietly.

Mr. Malcolm looked intently at the man opposite ; looked at him as though he was striving to read from his eyes and the expression on his face the thoughts that were passing in the mind behind them. For a moment the two men remained thus, and then Mr. Malcolm spoke again.

"In this house, doctor ?"

"Yes, Mr. Malcolm . . . in this house."

"Where ?"

" For the moment "—the doctor rose from the bed on which he had been seated, and at his first movement Mr. Malcolm rose also—" she is in a perfectly safe place, where, I am afraid, you will be unable to find her. She is, I understand, perfectly comfortable."

" I see," said Mr. Malcolm slowly, and as the other crossed over to the mantelpiece he watched him very closely, watched his every movement, watched particularly his hands. " So you propose to bargain your safety for that of Miss Gaynor ? "

" No," said the doctor quietly. " I have no intention of doing anything so stupid. If I judge you aright, Mr. Malcolm, you are fond of Miss Gaynor. I mean quite apart from the fact that if you could help it you wouldn't allow one hair of the head of any pretty girl to be touched. For it was you, presumably, who put her on to watching me ? "

" No," said Mr. Malcolm, " it so happened that circumstances dictated that she should see your exit from the hotel and follow you here not knowing your identity. It so happened also, that this very fact has been both of use and a drawback to me, for as you may imagine, her disappearance has made it awkward."

" Yes . . . most awkward. I can quite understand that."

Again there was silence while both men watched each other narrowly.

" But," said the doctor suddenly, taking a cigarette from the box that stood upon the mantelpiece and tapping it carefully on his thumbnail, " your surmise is incorrect, Mr. Malcolm. I have no intention of bargaining with you in any way which concerns Miss Gaynor. I have an eye for beauty and I have no desire to cause her more discomfort than I need. It was essential for me . . . or, rather, as I understood it at the time . . . it was essential for me to conceal her visit here from you as far as I could. I didn't know that young Venn was outside . . . that he had followed her. Had it not been for this—what shall I say?—corroboration, perhaps you would not have so easily come to your conclusions."

Mr. Malcolm shrugged his shoulders.

" Without it," he said, " I think it was fairly obvious."

" Yes." The doctor nodded thoughtfully. " Yes. Perhaps you are right."

With a quick movement he placed the cigarette between his lips and tapped his pocket with his hand as though in search of a match. Automatically Mr. Malcolm felt in his own. But even as he did so the doctor suddenly spoke, and as Mr. Malcolm glanced at him he realized at once how he had been trapped. For he was staring down the barrel of a small revolver held firmly in the doctor's right hand, a weapon which evidently the other had been striving to secure possession of in some unobtrusive casual way.

Mr. Malcolm cursed under his breath. He disliked being trapped. Mr. Malcolm cursed Marilyn under his breath. It was her fault: her disappearance had tied his hands and laid him open to the trap.

The doctor suddenly laughed harshly.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " you will quite understand that I do not propose to give myself up without a struggle for freedom . . . for my very existence, perhaps. I have admitted to you that I have committed two murders. True, you will still have to prove them, for I would make no public confession, but I can see, from all that you have told me, that it would be difficult for me to defend myself adequately. Therefore, I suggest that I should not be brought to trial."

" Oh ! " said Mr. Malcolm, without the slightest change in his attitude or expression, " and how do you propose to achieve this ? "

" Sit down ! "

The words were an order and Mr. Malcolm received them as such. He knew that for the moment he was at a disadvantage. He realized clearly that the man before him was desperate, and perhaps for a fleeting instant there passed through his mind an involuntary regret that Marilyn Gaynor's actions had made him choose this particular method by which to obtain his ends. But for a second only. Mr. Malcolm had previously found himself in danger of his life, and Mr. Malcolm was no coward. Without a word he sat down in that chair which he had occupied before.

The doctor advanced to him. The doctor satisfied himself that Mr. Malcolm carried no weapon.

" There are one or two things, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor quietly, " which you may like to know, just to fill in the gaps in your story. I may confess that up to the present it has been surprisingly accurate, although a great deal must have been mere surmise. But you have told me that if you could find that piece of paper, which must have formed the backbone of the blackmail, then your case would be made ever so much more clear.

" Years ago when practising in Harley Street I was in league with Dickson, and one letter, the only letter which ever passed between us, was completely forgotten by me. It was forgotten for a period of nearly twenty years, but about six months ago I received a letter from Dickson, whose whereabouts were entirely unknown to me. This letter was addressed correctly with the new name which I have adopted and this address which has been mine since I left London—facts of which I had believed Dickson to be unaware. You can imagine the surprise, the unwelcome surprise I received when I got that letter."

The doctor paused, but only for a moment.

" Mr. Malcolm," he said, " that cowardly weapon which I have learnt to hate so much, that cowardly weapon which I cannot deny I have used myself against innocent people, was used against me. Dickson told me that he had that letter: Dickson informed me that the destruction of that letter alone stood between me and the long term of imprisonment which would follow should it be handed over to the police. Dickson told me with the plausible cant of glib hypocrisy that he much regretted having to take this step, especially against his old friend and partner, but that he had come on lean times and money was essential to him. It was perfectly obvious what his intentions were. I was to pay, and pay to my last penny, to recover that letter, the only piece of evidence which could convict me, the one thing which it was quite imperative that I should have. For you yourself acknowledged, Mr. Malcolm, that I was clever . . . that at the time it was impossible for the police to convict me. I suppose Dickson didn't produce this letter then because he realized what a powerful weapon he held against me, intending to use it possibly, on just such an occasion as this when he was in deep water. No doubt he regarded it as I regard the securities in my bank . . . as realizable at any time. Well, the time came and Dickson sent me his ultimatum.

" I wrote back at once. I think that in the first moment when I received that letter, Mr. Malcolm, I made up my mind that I would not buy it . . . that I would get it by guile or force, if necessary. I was determined not to succumb to this blackmailer, and if he proved an obstruction to my purpose then I would kill the man. I wrote to Dickson and made an appointment to meet him at St. Andrews . . . an appointment for to-night. I was a trifle mystified, therefore, when I received another note yesterday, presumably from him, stating that he would call on me last night. I made inquiries and discovered that a man named Dickson was staying at the Supreme, but it was not the Dickson I knew. In a vague sort of way I then realized that some impersonation was being carried out. Not quite understanding how things were going I agreed to keep the appointment for last night. Being very puzzled, however, I met most of the expresses at the station and I saw Dickson—the real Dickson—arrive. I followed him to the hotel and by a circuitous route I managed to reach the verandah of the room into which he went. It so happened that I lost both my head and my temper when I overheard the conversation which took place between Fletcher and Dickson, and in a moment of fury I shot the man who had once been my partner, shot him through the open window, from where I stood."

Again the doctor paused. Mr. Malcolm noticed that beads of sweat were shining on his brow and realized that the recital of this tale and the recollection of its incidents affected the man strongly.

" The moment I had done so, Mr. Malcolm," continued the doctor quietly, after a few moments had passed, " I realized what a fool I had been. Far better to have let these two fight it out together : far better to have dealt only with that one who held the paper, but my hatred for Dickson got the better of me. And then as I looked again through that window I realized that something very strange was happening. I realized, to my immense astonishment, that Fletcher . . . whose name then I did not know . . . quite obviously, as his actions proved, believed he himself had committed the murder ! I decided to keep him under observation for the moment.

" This I did for quite long enough to realize that my surmise was correct and that Fletcher was doing all in his power to conceal *my* action. You can imagine, Mr. Malcolm "—the doctor smiled—" how delighted I was and how gladly I allowed him to pursue his plan. But I had heard enough of their conversation to understand that the document which I required so much was in the hands of Fletcher, and I realized another thing—that this new opponent was, perhaps, more dangerous than Dickson had been, for he took it all so calmly . . . the fact that he believed himself to have committed a murder, the ingenious way in which he covered up his tracks. In fact, it was sheer bad luck that he was ever found out."

" Not entirely bad luck," said Mr. Malcolm quietly, " it was the result of a scintillating object striking the eye of an observant man."

" I don't understand," said the doctor.

" A *green* scintillating object," said Mr. Malcolm, " a sequin, to be exact, off a lady's dress, which had no business to be in Fletcher's room. However . . . I am digressing."

" On the contrary," said the doctor quickly, " you are interesting me very much."

" That may be," said Mr. Malcolm, " but there are certain things, doctor, which there is no need for you to know . . . as yet. Pray continue."

" Well," said the doctor, in rather a disappointed voice, " what actually happened was that I decided, in my rather unique position as a medical man, to get him into my power. I, therefore, arranged his fall from the stairs. You were quite right, Mr. Malcolm, and that will explain to you the startled words used by the injured man. But he was afraid. He knew that some attack was being made upon him, and naturally he could not complain, which would entail explaining his business in St. Andrews. Of course, I took great care that my name should not be mentioned and he never knew who was attending him, nor did he ever suspect. When I first met Fletcher, just after his accident, he naturally asked me my name and I took the precaution of giving myself the nice easy name of ' Smith.' I knew I had to take the risk of anyone addressing me by my own name—but, well, I had to chance that. Also, I had definitely decided in my own mind that I would require very little time in which to carry out my plan.

" I made him drink that overdose of sleeping-draught, for it was an overdose of sleeping-draught, Mr. Malcolm, that killed him. I told him it would cool his nerves and quieten the pain he would suffer from his ankle when he went out that evening. It was rather pleasant finding him so completely in my power. Frankly, Mr. Malcolm, I enjoyed those moments."

He paused again.

" I think that is all that I need tell you, Mr. Malcolm," he said quietly. " I will now place before you my plans for our immediate future."

" That is not all that you need tell me," said Mr. Malcolm quickly, and there was a dominant note audible in his voice. " You have still not answered my question: where is Marilyn Gaynor ? "

" Bless my soul," said the doctor at once. " Fancy forgetting that beautiful lady ! She is between my garage and the wall of my garden, Mr. Malcolm."

Mr. Malcolm looked at the other quietly without speaking for a moment. Then :

" I don't quite understand you," he said.

" I didn't expect you to," said the doctor quickly. " You will appreciate, Mr. Malcolm that a person in my position, of whom proof as to his old and much abhorred misdeeds might be found at any moment, causing his detention by the police, had to have some sort of provision, in case of necessity, some provision for a rapid and complete disappearance. As anyone in St. Andrews will tell you, I built my garage with my own hands, pulling down a piece of the garden wall for its back. This wall is very thick. Mine is one of the oldest gardens in St. Andrews, and I bought the house with this object in view. There is a back wall to my garage, and although quite invisible to the naked eye, there is a door built into the back of the garage and a hollow space in the wall. I made full arrangements for eventualities and I have always kept there, in a state of freshness, provisions which would have lasted one person quite a considerable length of time. Miss Gaynor is now in that rather cramped space, but she is perfectly safe and comparatively happy and you will be glad to hear that not one hair of her head has been touched. She was quite sensible about it: she merely preceded the barrel of my revolver to this place and entered it without any struggle. I closed the door upon her."

"And how," said Mr. Malcolm quickly, "do you open that door?"

"You open that door," said the doctor, "in this way. Half the back wall slides into a slot in the side of the wall. For although the wall appears to be made of brick and mortar, Mr. Malcolm, it is really only a rather clever imitation. The mechanism is actuated by a spring concealed behind the fifth brick from the top of the wall right in the centre of it. Press this and the lock is released . . . you can slide the door. There now, Mr. Malcolm, Miss Gaynor has returned to you."

" Not quite," said Mr. Malcolm rising at once, " I will . . ."

" Sit down ! "

The doctor's voice was firm, yet it was not his tone that Mr. Malcolm obeyed but the unswerving aim of the revolver he held in his hand.

" Certainly."

He sat down again.

" You will save much time by this knowledge a little later on," said the doctor firmly. " For the moment, Mr. Malcolm, we are going to play a game of chance."

" A *what* ? "

" I said what I meant, Mr. Malcolm. We are going to play a game of chance, and the loser will, for the space of about a couple of hours—if my medical skill has not deserted me—become oblivious to the happenings which are worrying both of us."

Mr. Malcolm looked at the doctor in silence, then he dropped his gaze to a worn patch in the carpet before the hearth. For a long while Mr. Malcolm stared at it fixedly, but his eyes saw nothing of the threadbare pattern, his thoughts were far away. The faces of Marilyn

. . . Venn . . . Inspector Varney flashed across his mind, to be replaced an instant later by the white fixity of the face he had seen lying so still upon the pillows of a bed in room number thirty-seven of the Hotel Supreme. The pause had lengthened considerably before Mr. Malcolm spoke, but when he did his voice was quite even but absolutely final.

" I cannot trade with you, doctor," he said quietly.

" Of course you can't," replied the other, " at least not willingly, but may I remind you that " —he tapped the revolver significantly with the fingers of his left hand—" you have no choice ! "

CHAPTER XXVII

Mr. Malcolm plays above Himself

AGAIN there was a pause while the two men stared at each other. Then with a sudden change in his voice the doctor continued :

" You are interested in golf, I understand ? "

Mr. Malcolm smiled.

" It is my hobby," he said.

" Sacrilege, Mr. Malcolm, sacrilege ! " cried the doctor. " To describe the great game of golf, and in St. Andrews, too, as a hobby ! However . . . we will let that pass. Have you ever played a game of golf within the precincts of a room ? "

" Not a whole game," said Mr. Malcolm, with something in his eye which seemed to denote that he was enjoying the situation, " but I have practised approach shots in my bedroom into the local furniture."

" That is not what I meant, Mr. Malcolm."

The doctor looked at him and as he did so his expression appeared to change. Anyone watching would have been quite unable to appreciate the fact that here was a man, self-confessed murderer to a police official, discussing what he had himself termed " a game of chance," the outcome of which would mean, should he lose, the loss also of his life. The only clue to the situation between the two men, a situation so strange in all its features, lay in that revolver held unswervingly pointed towards the body of Mr. Malcolm, from which the latter allowed neither his eyes nor his mind to stray for even the space of a moment.

" What I am getting at, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor suddenly, " is that I have reached the turning of the ways, if I may so describe it. For twenty years I have lived a life devoted entirely to the benefit of my patients. For my life before that I feel that in those years I have done my best to make reparation."

" That," said Mr. Malcolm quietly, " I will gladly acknowledge to you."

" Thank you, Mr. Malcolm. Then came the threat to my liberty, then came this blackmailer, or, I should say, these blackmailers, who threatened me with the loss of perhaps some ten years of my life. Think of it, Mr. Malcolm, think of it . . . at my age ! Twenty years ago when I deserved the sentence, perhaps then I could have stood the punishment, for I would still have been comparatively young when I left prison. But if it happened to me now it would break me, Mr. Malcolm, not financially, not in any worldly way, but physically. I am over fifty, Mr. Malcolm. I am too old to spend the next ten years in prison. So I have made up my mind."

He paused and for a perceptible space of time both men looked at each other, and there was a gleam of sympathy in the eyes of Mr. Malcolm.

"You say you have made up your mind," he said inquiringly and encouragingly. "Well, what do you propose to do?"

"I am a great believer in luck, Mr. Malcolm," went on the doctor, "and although I consider that my luck has turned most terribly against me in the last few weeks, yet I propose to give it still one more chance. You and I, Mr. Malcolm, are going to play a simple little game, a game of indoor golf. If I win that game I shall benefit by just two hours, for if I win, Mr. Malcolm, you are going to swallow a mixture which I shall prepare for you. Quite tasteless, I assure you! and it will do you no harm whatsoever but will merely send you to sleep for a period of at least two hours.

"But should *you* win, Mr. Malcolm, then I will take another draught, one which will put me to sleep . . . for all time. For then I shall really believe that my luck has turned against me for good, and that my last chance has gone."

"Do you mean to say," said Mr. Malcolm very quietly, "that you prefer certain death—for, presumably, should you lose this game you intend to kill yourself—to a chance of life . . . to a chance even of liberty?"

"Don't tempt me, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor calmly, "you know very well that although there might be a chance of life—for you would find it not too easy a matter convicting me of murder—yet, on the other hand, there could be no chance of liberty."

" Why ? " said Mr. Malcolm.

The doctor looked at him sharply.

" I don't understand you. I dislike your attitude," he said. " After all, I might have shot you straight away."

" Now listen," said Mr. Malcolm, " you could not be convicted years ago of a crime which you have confessed to me alone. Presumably you are in possession of the incriminating document which formed the blackmail. Why should you be convicted now, unless it be found in your effects ? "

" That it will not be, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor with a smile, " for I destroyed it as soon as I obtained possession of it last night. Yet the whole story is bound to come out and I don't wish to risk hanging by the neck until I am dead. You have described to me evidence which collected makes a very strong case ; I think most juries would feel it sufficient to convict me. No. I am determined on this. We are to play our game."

For a moment Mr. Malcolm paused before replying, for a moment he stared at the doctor, vainly striving to guess at his thoughts, but the man met his gaze frankly and unafraid, and never for one instant did the barrel of that revolver cease to point unswervingly at Mr. Malcolm's heart. Involuntarily Mr. Malcolm shuddered. He disliked profoundly the position in which he found himself.

" What guarantee have I," he said suddenly, " that whatever you make me drink—should I lose the game—would only put me to sleep for a very short time and would do me no harm ? "

" My word, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor with a smile. " My word."

" And supposing I suggest to you," said Mr. Malcolm, " that there have been incidents in your past which make your word, shall we say . . . ? "

" Don't bother to insult me," broke in the doctor, " I know what is in your mind. You have no guarantee, Mr. Malcolm, none whatever, but . . . you have no choice."

Once again he tapped the revolver with the fingers of his left hand.

Mr. Malcolm sighed.

" Very well," he said. " How do we play this game ? "

A gleam of triumph came into the doctor's eyes and for a moment Mr. Malcolm wondered whether he was, indeed, in complete control of his senses, whether he was not, perhaps, a little mad. But for a moment only, for the doctor's actions were careful, deliberate and well thought out. He moved about the room swiftly, but all the time his eyes were on Mr. Malcolm, and not for one instant did the barrel of his revolver waver in its aim. Returning to Mr. Malcolm, the doctor placed a small table between them and seated himself opposite. On the table he then placed two dice.

" Let us play a six-hole match," he said. " I am afraid one of eighteen holes would lay too great a strain upon the nerves of both of us! Let us keep to the rules of the Royal and Ancient as far as we can."

" With pleasure," said Mr. Malcolm, " but how ? "

" One of those dice is yours, Mr. Malcolm," said the doctor quietly. " It is many-sided and on each side is a number. The numbers range from one to six. So is mine. We will throw these dice in turn. Whatever number is foremost on your dice represents the number of strokes which you have taken to the hole. Whatever number is foremost on mine represents the number that I have taken. The rules of golf are otherwise our rules."

" What a delightful game," said Mr. Malcolm. " Then I can't possibly take more than six for one hole ? "

The doctor smiled.

" You are quite right, Mr. Malcolm . . . it is impossible."

Leaning forward Mr. Malcolm took his case from his pocket and lit a cigarette. He then picked up his dice and shook it in both hands. He let it drop on to the table. A three was foremost.

The doctor lifted his own dice in his left hand—his right being fully occupied with the revolver. Shaking it a moment he let it drop on to the table, and the four was foremost.

" One up to you," he said with a smile.

" Ah," said Mr. Malcolm, " a good start is always most encouraging."

" Your honour, Mr. Malcolm."

Again Mr. Malcolm threw his dice, and once again the three came up. The doctor threw his and as soon as he saw the result looked up at Mr. Malcolm.

" My luck," he said, " doesn't seem to be with me. A six—let us trust it wasn't a short hole. Two up to you, Mr. Malcolm."

Mr. Malcolm looked at the doctor. He could not refrain from a feeling of admiration, for before him was a man in the strange position of playing for his very life, perhaps, and yet, although he had lost two out of six holes, showing no sign of anxiety. He seemed, in fact, to be thoroughly enjoying the game, almost as though only a few coins were at stake.

Mr. Malcolm threw again.

" A one ! " cried the doctor. " A one ! "

" Thank God," said Mr. Malcolm, " that I have no caddie : otherwise the customary bottle of whisky would have to be provided."

" It appears to me," said the doctor, throwing his dice as he spoke, " that although you may not be providing a drink for your caddie, I may have to provide a drink for my principal.

Oh! a two! Rather bad luck, I think. Dormy, Mr. Malcolm."

"Yes." Mr. Malcolm spoke thoughtfully. "Three up with three to play. But supposing we halve this match, doctor? Supposing you win the next three holes?"

"Why, then," said the doctor, "as we must have a result, we will play one extra hole."

"And supposing we halve that too?"

"Why then . . . another, and so on until one of us does win. . . ."

"I see," said Mr. Malcolm quietly.

"A game to the death, you see," said the doctor, and gave a sudden laugh at his own grim joke. "A game to the death. Your honour still, Mr. Malcolm."

Again Mr. Malcolm threw his dice, but this time with less success: a six was showing. The doctor, with a four, won easily.

"Down to two in your favour, Mr. Malcolm."

He threw his dice and won again.

"You'll make a fight of it," said Mr. Malcolm.

"I have always made a fight of it," replied the other.

Once again he threw. A three turned up. Mr. Malcolm looked at him.

"I confess," he said, "that I have no desire to go to sleep for two hours. Let's hope that I can achieve at least a three."

He threw his dice. It wavered, then came to a standstill. The two was foremost.

Mr. Malcolm looked at the doctor. Now, for the first time, the man showed signs of the strain through which he had just passed: his face was drawn and haggard, his lips just a thin pale line, beads of sweat were shining on his brow and in his eyes there was a look of stunned realization.

It occurred to Mr. Malcolm that defeat had never entered his head.

Without a word, without pausing for a moment, he rose to his feet, and moved backwards towards a cupboard beside his desk, but all the while his revolver was pointed at Mr. Malcolm. Opening this cupboard his fingers searched for the bottle which he wanted. Evidently he was well aware as to its exact position, for his eyes never swerved from Mr. Malcolm for one second.

Mr. Malcolm watched him breathlessly. There was a sick feeling in his mind at the thought of witnessing helplessly while a man took his life before his eyes. At last he could stand the strain no longer. Suddenly Mr. Malcolm made up his mind: suddenly Mr. Malcolm jumped to his feet and dashed forward. But even as he covered the last yard he saw that the bottle had reached the doctor's lips, and with a loud clatter the revolver fell from between the nerveless fingers to the floor.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Marilyn adds Cream to Mr. Malcolm's Porridge

MR. MALCOLM looked at Inspector Varney. He smiled to him, a smile which changed his face with almost startling suddenness. From one moment, when the Mr. Malcolm who so consistently and successfully proved the police wrong or aided them to the right conclusion, peered with eyes agleam round the scene of the crime, to the next, when the Mr. Malcolm who was everybody's friend relaxed to thoughts of golf, was but the flash of a second.

" All clear, Inspector ? "

" All clear . . . and thank you, Mr. Malcolm."

" Tut, tut," said Mr. Malcolm, " you are a crocodile, Varney ! You know you are bitterly disappointed that I can but offer you a corpse ! How much happier would you have been with a real live murderer to string up ! Well, well." He paused. He looked at his watch. " I wonder if my porridge is ready ? "

He looked around him. The day was still but a child in arms, the lounge of the Supreme was still deserted. He took the Inspector by the arm.

" *Porridge,* Varney."

But even as they took the first step towards the dining-room, Noel Venn intercepted them.

A new Noel Venn. A washed and shaved Noel Venn. A cleanly dressed Noel Venn. And, to Mr. Malcolm's observant eye, an exhilarated and practically boisterous Noel Venn.

" How is Marilyn ? " asked Mr. Malcolm.

" Perfectly all right. Having breakfast in bed. Oh, Mr. Malcolm, how can I thank you. . . ? "

" You can't," said Mr. Malcolm. " Why should you, anyway ? "

The young man blushed.

" Because "—he hesitated—" because she's going to marry me."

Mr. Malcolm smiled, and genuine pleasure showed in his face.

" I'm glad she's stopped leading you up the garden path ! " he said quietly.

Noel Venn laughed.

" When I saw her this morning, coming out of that . . . that prison in the wall and looking as fresh as . . . as . . ."

" Porridge," said Mr. Malcolm to the smiling Varney.

" Looking so fresh," said Venn, " garden paths weren't in it. She rushed me up *and* down a one-way street."

Mr. Malcolm solemnly shook hands. So did

Inspector Varney. Noel Venn went off to find someone else to tell.

" Varney," said Mr. Malcolm, " porridge and *cream*."

THE END